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THE EMIGRANT

BY

L. F. DOSTOIEFFSKAYA

TRANSLATED BY

VERA MARGOLIES

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

STEPHEN GRAHAM

NEW YORK
BRENTANO'S
1916

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PREFACE

"THE EMIGRANT" (*Emigranta*), by L. F. Dostoieffskaya, a daughter of Dostoieffsky the novelist, was published in 1913, and obtained considerable success in Russia. It is a study of the life of a Russian girl (or should we say woman? for she is not young) in Italy. It is a deeply interesting study of contemporary types. In truth, only two Russians take part in the story, the hero and heroine, Prince Gzhatsky and Irene. But the long struggle which is portrayed is a Russian struggle.

These Russians, however, are not the Russians of Dostoieffsky's time. They are clearly of to-day.

> Pride in Russia, and in Russia's might and wealth and brilliant future, was one of Irene's greatest joys. The Russian people seemed to her to be a race of chivalrous knights, ever ready to

> fight for truth and Christianity, and to defend the weak and the persecuted. When the Japanese War broke out, she asked herself, with the sincerest astonishment, how such pitiful monkeys ever could have declared war on such indomitable knights. She even pitied the Japanese for having fallen victims to such madness! Her despair and suffering at the news of our first failures is therefore easy to imagine. None of Irene's near relations were at the war, but each of our losses, nevertheless, found its echo in her heart, like a personal misfortune. Overwhelmed with grief, she attached no importance either to the Russian revolution, or to the reforms that followed. Like all passionate idealists when their ideal is shattered, Irene rushed to the other extreme—that of a profound contempt for Russia.

And it is in contempt of Russia that the heroine finds consolation in Italy, and is even ready to throw over the Orthodox Church to which she belongs and enter a convent of *sœurs mauves*.

The chief interest in the book is the conflict between the influence of a certain Père Etienne and the influence of a compatriot of handsome looks and robust mind, Prince Gzhatsky. Irene is in a *pension* "teeming with old maids." She is herself forty and un-

married. She is apparently without near of kin, and is lonely beyond words, but also selfish and extremely condemnatory in her outlook. But she is vivacious, spontaneous, engaging, and always asking pertinent questions.

The high demands she made of her ideal hero, the man she might marry, give one the idea that there is a certain amount of autobiography in this volume, for no doubt ideals ranged high in the home of Dostoieffsky. It is strange, however, that the question of selfishness and unselfishness does not arise in this enthralling study of an unsatisfied soul. Dostoieffsky himself was never tired of a certain Gospel sentence, the thought of which might have given calm to Irene: "Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit." The whole book, however, has a haunting suggestion of Dostoïeffsky—the ghost of the father is somewhere about.

This poor Russian woman has, however, lost herself in going to Rome. One sees

how much happier she would have been if she had remained at home. It is common in Russians to go into ecstasy about Italy when they see it first.

"In Italy, amidst the brilliance and magnificence of Nature, in the magnificent chaos of cities buzzing with automobiles, humming with factories, you feel at least that Man is not losing himself; you feel he is the master, the centre. But in Moscow . . ." wrote Gorky, another unhappy exile; and it is a characteristic expression. The exile admires the West, but he must return to Russia.

A word should be said as to the discussion of the relative merits or demerits of the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches. It is not very competently handled by the authoress, but there is at least one most effective comment on ecclesiasticism as such:

"In your place I would go a little further still," exclaimed Irene's inner soul with malicious sarcasm. "I would destroy every New Testament in the world, except one—and that one I would put in a golden, jewel-

studded box, and would bury it deep in the earth, forbidding its disinterment on pain of death. Over it, I would build a splendid golden shrine, and in this shrine I would celebrate night and day magnificent services with gorgeous processions. That would be entirely in accordance with the spirit of your Christianity."

And she yearns for a Christianity freed from the prison walls of churches and forms.

Irene, however, thinks that if the Orthodox Russian Church elected a Patriarch it might recover its ancient power, and utter a "new word." And there once more we see vaguely the ghost of Dostoieffsky. The great Russian, however, would not have spoken so kindly of the Roman Church (which he regarded as a sort of political conspiracy against Christianity).

STEPHEN GRAHAM.

LONDON,
April, 1916.

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THE EMIGRANT

I

Il n'y a qu'un héroisme au monde : c'est de voir le monde tel qu'il est—et de l'aimer.—ROMAIN ROLLAND.

ON the 15th of October, 19—, at four o'clock in the afternoon, in the garden of the Monte Pincio in Rome, sat a girl, no longer in the first flush of youth, Irene Mstinskaia. She held a book in her hand, having come to the park with the object of reading in the fresh air ; but, as had always been the case since her arrival in Rome, she could not concentrate her thoughts on the English novel open before her. Her glance glided across the blue autumnal sky, lingered caressingly on the magnificent southern pines and palms, rested on the statues gleaming white among the verdure, and always returned to the

Eternal City, as it lay spread out before her, at the feet of the Pincio.

Irene had travelled much and seen much, but no town had yet produced so deep an impression on her. She tried in vain to define this power that Rome wielded over her, and, finding no explanation, she invented one of her own: "Who knows," thought Irene dreamily, "perhaps people never really quite die, but remain for ever hovering in spirit round those places where they have most forcibly lived and suffered. It may be that Rome is full of the ghosts of ancient Romans, of early Christians, of Renaissance painters, of nineteenth-century Italians, who died nobly in the struggle for Italy's freedom and unity. All these phantoms are unable to tear themselves away from their beloved Eternal City. They are the rulers of Rome to-day, as much as in their own time, and we, foreigners, fall under their influence and cannot dissociate our thoughts from them."

On the whole, the influence of Rome was not only overwhelming—it was also soothing. Wandering in museums, among ruins, through

churches and catacombs, Irene felt, day by day, stealing into her soul a profound, indescribable sense of peace, such as that which unconsciously comes over one as one enters a convent. And it was just for this holy stillness and peace that her tired soul was thirsting.

Let not the reader think, however, that my heroine had passed through the storm of some great misfortune, or the suffering of some severe illness. On the contrary, her life and circumstances were such, that many a short-sighted and superficial observer envied her exceèdingly.

At the death of her parents, Irene had remained entirely free, with plenty of money, a good name, and a good position in society. She enjoyed excellent health, in spite of the fact that she had been born and had passed all her life in Petrograd; she was clever and well educated. What more, one asks oneself, could anyone desire of the Fates?

But, somehow, it is an unfortunate fact in dear Russia, that even the most precious gifts of the gods seem never to be of any

benefit to our people. How is one to explain this curious circumstance? Does it arise from some peculiarity in the Russian temperament, or from the general disorder and purposelessness of our way of living? The French, in the similar case of "La Belle au Bois Dormant," have laid all the blame at the door of the wicked fairy who was offended at not being invited to the christening. I think I shall not go far wrong if I say that in Russia the part of the wicked fairy is played by the parents of the infant themselves. Oh, of course not intentionally, but simply as a consequence of our Russian laziness and the absence of organized and formulated ideas in the bringing up of our children.

Irene Mstinskaia lost her mother early and was brought up by her father, a scientist who spent all his life in his laboratory, disliked society, and received nobody but an occasional friend, as jealously devoted to science as himself. He adored his little Irene, petted and spoiled her; but, like most Russian parents, took very little interest in her spiritual development. The child grew up,

lonely, silent, pensive. Books took, in her young life, the place of companions and childish games. She read a great deal without guidance or discrimination, and gained all her ideas on life, all her faith, all her ideals and aims and aspirations from books. Books stood between her and reality, and hid from her those deep truths that can never be learnt from even the greatest literary production, but can only be understood after long years of untiring observation and experience. It was in books also that Irene found her ideal of the man she could love. Her hero was an exceedingly complicated character. He united in himself the stoicism of an ancient Roman, the romanticism of a mediæval knight, the gallantry of a powdered marquis, and the dignified chivalry of the hero of an English novel.

Do not laugh, reader! Irene was not stupid; she was only young and inexperienced, knew little or nothing of life, and sincerely believed in her fantastic dream hero. Most pathetic of all was the fact that she set about looking for him among the relations and

friends of her late mother, who had belonged by birth to the higher government circles—*i.e.*, the most unromantic circles of Russian society. The proximity of the court, the glitter of wealth and social position, transforms almost every young Petrograd official into a mere hunter after honours, money, decorations, caring for nothing but his career and the chance of some brilliant appointment. The distance that separates Petrograd from the rest of Russia destroys in these young people what should be the fundamental idea at the root of all conscientious government service—the good of the country. Their service becomes simply a ladder by which they can mount upwards towards the making of a career, and any means seems justifiable to attain this end. Already in childhood these young people are familiar with conversations about promotions and honours, and their souls early imbibe the poison that makes worldlings and cynics. Their wives also cannot influence them for good, since they, too, in the majority of cases grow up in the same official circles, and see

nothing blameworthy in career-hunting. On the contrary, they intrigue and help and encourage their husbands in the rush for advantageous appointments.

To a fresh young soul such as Irene's the cynicism of "officialdom's" conversations and ideals could not but stand out in all its true ugliness, causing her to turn away, sick with disillusionment and disgust. She regarded this whole spirit of self-advancement-at-any-price with the profoundest contempt, and considered it low and vulgar and worthy only of menials. Her father, holding his noble birth in high honour, had instilled into his daughter the assurance that her aristocratic antecedents placed her on a level with all the de Rohans and de Montmorencys in the world. She regarded decorations and titles and social honours with contempt, and could not understand how anybody could attach importance to such toys. Her means were sufficient to ensure lifelong freedom from care; luxury, however, did not attract her, for Irene was an idealist, who looked upon love, pure, sanctified love, as the greatest happiness life could offer.

Had she been English or American, this lonely girl would not have been content with her limited circle of acquaintances, and would have gone in search of her hero through the length and breadth not only of Russia, but of all Europe.

Irene, however, was Russian, and therefore placid and unenterprising! So she not only did not travel, but had not the energy, even at home in Petrograd, to look round and make sure that her hero was not concealed somewhere in the social circles of the capital. She profoundly despised the pitiful types she met in society, and though sick at heart, waited patiently and untiringly for the one man before whom she was destined some day to bow her head. Her own individual faith was largely responsible for this patient, confident expectation. Already in her early childhood, Irene had worked out for herself her own personal credo, in the place of which, without understanding it in the least, most people unthinkingly accept the religion officially adopted by the State. Her faith, of course, rested upon a Christian basis—but

her Christianity was of the kind that shapes itself according to the varying idiosyncrasies of every individual believer's soul and mind.

Irene firmly believed that in spite of the perpetual struggle between good and evil, good is incomparably the stronger of the two, and must always triumph. Therefore, people desirous of attaining happiness, must as a first step be just and honourable, and never offend nor hurt anyone. Then, and then only, can God send them peace and success in all their undertakings, and then only can they be happy without the smallest struggle or effort to attain this natural happiness. Irene believed in this so firmly and deeply, that it always amazed her to see people winning success and worldly goods by means of intrigue and dishonesty.

"The madmen!"—she thought to herself —"how can they not realize that they are building up their well-being on sand, and that each dishonest action may turn out to be the one rotten beam through which the whole edifice will fall to pieces?"

Irene often endeavoured to explain her theory to other people, and was always astonished at their lack of trust in God's help, and their incomparably greater faith in their own "smartness" and roguery. How did these blind mules manage not to see what was, to her, clear as day? And Irene profoundly regretted that she was not endowed with oratorical gifts, by means of which she might have helped to save these people from needlessly wasting and misdirecting their energies.

The silent, dreamy girl carefully observed the lives of her acquaintances, and every time that any of them achieved some success, or suffered some misfortune, she tried to account for this circumstance by one or other of their preceding actions. I am afraid that in her eagerness to prove, even to herself, the justice of her theory, she often deceived herself, and dragged in irrelevant facts. She was sincerely happy at the sight of virtue rewarded, and, though naturally anything but cruel or revengeful, she nevertheless rejoiced triumphantly when wicked-

ness was laid low! It is true that occasionally, under the influence of scientific books, which, as the years passed, held an ever-increasing attraction for Irene, she said to herself that people were wicked owing to the particular construction of their skulls or spinal cords, and were as innocent of their own vice as the tiger is innocent of his carnivorous nature. In the same way, it followed that it was not only natural and easy for good people to be good, but that it would be exceedingly difficult for them to act dishonestly, or in any way contrary to their natures. There was, indeed, according to this theory, no such thing as the eternal struggle between good and evil—there were only on the one side healthy and therefore honest natures, and on the other, morally diseased and, therefore, cruel or vicious ones. But when Irene began to meditate on these ideas, there arose in her poor head such a confused chaos of tangled thoughts, that she hastily banished all scientific propositions, and returned to her old faith, in which everything was clear and simple.

Irene worked carefully and untiringly at herself and her own moral and mental development. She not only did not admit of any dishonourable action, but severely admonished and persecuted herself for every bad thought, every shade of feeling, that tended towards envy or revenge. And so, as always happens when one works long and obstinately for the achievement of a certain result, Irene really succeeded in raising her own honour and integrity to a point beyond reproach. The loftier grew her own ideal, however, the more difficult she found it to reconcile herself to the weaknesses of others. Day by day, her requirements in connection with her unknown hero increased, and day by day he became always more difficult to find. She submitted every man who crossed her path to so severe an examination that not one passed through it successfully. The young married women of her acquaintance, noticing how wistfully she looked at their children, advised her to marry, even without love, only to become a mother and thus attain the one real aim, the

one true happiness that life can give to a woman. Irene listened to their advice with amazement. According to her ideas, a woman had no right to bring a new life into the world unless she had found a man who could pass on to the child only the highest and most irreproachable moral qualities. Such an idea is, of course, fundamentally good and logical—but, unfortunately, it is also somewhat difficult to carry out! Nature is so fantastic and capricious, that sometimes a child may bear no likeness whatever to its ideal parents, but may bear a striking and very unwelcome resemblance to some long-forgotten black sheep great-grandfather! On the whole, indeed, resignation, and faith in God's mercy, are the most suitable frames of mind in this connection; but these are frames of mind that one could hardly expect from Irene! Idealists who passionately believe in their ideals, hypnotize themselves and become the slaves of their own thoughts.

At thirty, in order to avoid any future moral torment at the appearance of a grey hair or a decayed tooth, Irene decided that

she was an old woman, and that there was no longer any occasion to think about love. She began to dress always in black, and assumed with men the air of an old maiden aunt. Her dream now was only of friendship, and she longed for the warmth of a friendly hearth.

Her women friends, however, did not believe in her sincerity, did not consider her as old as she imagined herself to be, and were afraid for their husbands. Year by year, Irene felt herself to be always increasingly lonely and isolated, and then, suddenly, came the Japanese War.

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Everything became cold and indifferent to her in her homeland. She no longer believed in anybody; she trusted neither the masses nor the educated classes. They were all cowards, they were all narrow, lazy, and ignorant. She began to go abroad more frequently. There, in contrast, everything pleased her immensely. She admired the German peasants for their love of work, the Swiss for their orderliness, the French for their wit. In old days, after having passed three months abroad, she had always grown homesick, and on reaching the Russian frontier, had felt inclined to em-

brace the very railway porters for their good-humoured Slavonic faces! Now, she returned home with regret, found fault with Russian arrangements, and looked with disgust at the endless, monotonous fields, at the dull, slumbering type of life and nature that slipped placidly along outside the windows of the sleepy train.

Her contempt for Russia was encouraged by the countless critical and scathing articles that appeared in the newspapers as a result of the newly granted freedom of the Press. According to these articles all Russia's resources had been used up by drink and by robbery, and the whole country was in a state of ruin and primitive savagery. They did not attempt to explain why, all this being so, Russia had not, long ago, died of starvation and famine, why our government stock stood higher than before the war, and why Europe set as much value as ever on Russian opinion. But Irene, like most women, did not measure the rights and wrongs of the newspaper accusations. They were in tune with her pessimistic mood, and she no longer

believed in Russia, just as she no longer believed in her own happiness.

The most cruel pain of all, however, was that occasioned by a gradually awakening doubt about the justice of her own beliefs. It seemed to her that, logically, it was time God rewarded her in some way for her scrupulous honesty, and she suffered at the absence of this reward. In observing the lives of others, Irene could persuade herself that if they had no outward success, they enjoyed the greater blessing of inner peace and happiness. It was difficult, however, to deceive her own self in this matter; for, indeed, poor Irene not only had no happiness, but the boon of inner peace had not even been granted to her. Her soul had been wounded, torn, immersed in darkness and despair, from which there seemed no escape. And yet there, before her very eyes, wicked and dishonourable people triumphed and rejoiced. How was this to be explained? Could her credo have been a mistake, could she have been struggling and wandering all her life along the wrong path? Such an

admission would have been, for Irene, equal to suicide—for she could never have reconciled herself to a world in which only wickedness and deceit triumph.

Life in Russia grew at last so unbearable that she decided to emigrate. Her first idea was to go and live in England, with which country she was acquainted through the medium of her beloved English novels. By chance, however, Zola's "Rome," with its magnificent descriptions of Roman life, fell into her hands, and she suddenly felt drawn towards Italy. It is for this reason that we find her, on this warm autumn day, sitting in the garden of the Monte Pincio.

II

IRENE's first impression on arriving in Rome was one of disappointment. Her imagination was impregnated with visions of the Roman Forum, of proud Romans in togas, of fighting gladiators, of the splendour of the Emperors and the dazzling luxury of the papal court. What wonder, then, if she almost resented the many-storied houses, the shops, the tramways, and the prosaic crowd in its ugly, contemporary attire?

Her disappointment, however, was only transitory, and in spite of her depressed and gloomy state of mind, the magic charm of Rome soon won the day over her low spirits. It is always, indeed, difficult for a northener to resist the sparkling and effervescent sense of gaiety which awakens in his heart under the rays of the southern sun.

At first, only the mediæval portion of the town absorbed and attracted Irene. She spent days in wandering through labyrinths of narrow, dirty, unpaved streets, where people, horses, donkeys, tramways, and bicycles moved along, an apparently inextricable mass, in the uneven roadway. She felt sad and sick at heart at sight of the miserable dwellings — rather hovels than houses—in which, till the present day, the poor of Rome find shelter. What a contrast between these wretched abodes and the magnificence of the neighbouring Palazzos, with their splendid courtyards and marble colonnades enclosing little gardens overgrown with palms and orange-trees! Even the luxury of the Palazzos, however, depressed Irene. Her mind wandered back to the Middle Ages, and it seemed to her that she had found the key to all the cruelty and injustice of those dark, bygone days. How could kindness and honour and mercy flourish in such gloomy palaces, in such dismal narrow alleys where God's sunlight never penetrated? No wonder, indeed, if humanity, having at

last thrown off the mediæval régime, hastened, immediately after the French Revolution, to escape from these labyrinths of dark and crooked alleys, and invented a new type of towns, whose streets were broad and flooded with sunshine.

The only bright spots that relieved, to Irene, the gloom of mediæval Rome, were the Piazzas, with their gorgeous fountains. Here was the best place for observing the Roman crowd, a crowd always interesting and characteristic, even though robbed, in these days, of its picturesque national costume.

There is a woman, hatless and coatless, in spite of the cold winter's day, sitting by the fountain with a child in her arms, drawing water and finishing her *bambino's* toilet in the open air. Opposite her, on the doorstep of someone's house, a young carpenter is resting, having left the new table he was carrying to a customer in the middle of the road, in everyone's way. The slight frown on his pink, dirty face distinctly says: "Gone are the good old times! Where are the bandits that used to hide among the ruins of the Cam-

pagna, and receive with open arms fellows like me, who love a gay, careless life, and have no mission for hard work ?"

His brothers in spirit, healthy, happy, lazy, young scamps, are loitering about the Piazza, with boxes of cheap mosaic trinkets, smiling caressingly at passing Englishwomen, and saucily offering them their goods : " Des mosaïques, madame ? Très jolies et pas chères !" There is a passing *vetturino* (cabman) raising his finger, and gazing fixedly at the *forestiere* (foreigner), implying with look and gesture an obliging readiness to drive him to the end of the earth. Leaning against a column, there stands the plague of contemporary Rome : a middle-aged guide, with the face of a benevolent old father who has had no luck in life. He is muffled up in a brightly coloured scarf, and with a massive walking-stick in his hand, he lingers beside a historical monument and awaits his victim, the next unsuspecting and simple passing tourist. He stares gloomily at a crowd of shrieking street urchins, who have just emerged from a neighbouring alley. They are supposed to be selling newspapers,

but actually they are eternally fighting, rolling in the dust, throwing about and soiling the newly printed journals. They are dispersed and driven away with a stick by a tall, bent old man, picturesquely draped in an enormous grey cloth cloak with a fur collar. This garment the old man has dragged as a remembrance from the shoulders of a late faithful lodger, recently deceased at an extreme old age. The inconsolable landlord is going to a *festa*, one of those solemn Masses, with a Cardinal officiating, which are celebrated almost every day in one or other of Rome's innumerable churches. Behind his indescribably dirty ear, that has never been washed since his birth, he has tucked a red carnation, as a sign of respect to the saint whose memory he is going to honour.

Suddenly, a group of wandering musicians show themselves on the Piazza. One plays the violin, another blows a trumpet, while a third, in a broken top-hat and a rusty overcoat, sings *canzonettas*, and dances. Immediately, a crowd collects. At all the open windows appear signoras with black eyes and

raven tresses, pushing away with their hands the rags hung out to dry. They are all laughing and screaming and chattering, they are all happy. This is still the same pleasure-loving ancient-Roman crowd, living more in the street than at home, and revelling in anything in the nature of a pageant. Arrange a gladiator's fight to-morrow in the Colosseum, and they will all rush to the spot, and applaud the victor as passionately as ever did their ancestors.

Sometimes these Piazzas are the scenes of antiquarian markets. Light wooden booths are erected for the sale of old cassocks and other priestly vestments, pieces of material, embroideries, lace, old brooches, bracelets, fans, candlesticks in the shape of antique lamps, books printed on faded yellow parchment, pictures, and statuettes. All this is bought up fast and feverishly by Englishwomen and Americans, whom the wily Romans deceive in the most ungodly manner.

On one such occasion, Irene, to her cost, asked the price of a piece of lace. The vendor, having asked a hundred lire, followed

her twice round the Piazza, lowering his price at each step, and setting out in detail all the tragic circumstances that were forcing him to part with such a treasure. He had received the lace as a present from the Marquise Abrakadabra-Abrakadabrini. This highly aristocratic name was undoubtedly familiar to the signora? His "mamma" had been the wet-nurse of the young Marchesina, so that he, Beppo, was her foster-brother. He had hoped to mend his fortunes for life by selling this priceless lace, but poverty (he spoke with great pathos, tragically smiting his chest)—poverty, signora, was obliging him to act hurriedly, and to abandon his last hope. At least, he had the one consolation of knowing that this family treasure was falling into the hands of such a sympathetic signora—"*Look out!*" he screamed suddenly, clutching hold of the shafts of a cab that threatened to run them over. He was only too happy to have been able to render the signora two services: first, that of saving her life, since, but for his intervention, the *vetturino* would undoubtedly have run over her; and second, that of sell-

ing her, for a song, a priceless piece of lace, in which the signora would look as beautiful as a queen.

When he had dropped his price from a hundred lire to twenty, Irene, only too anxious to be rid of her irksome follower, paid him, and hurried away with her purchase, for which she had not only lost all interest, but which she by that time positively detested. On her return home, she showed it to the landlord of her *pension*. He shook his head pityingly, twirled his finger in front of his nose, smacked his lips, and announced that "la pauvre signorina a été volée comme dans un bois."

Irene began to think that old, mediæval Rome had bewitched her. On many occasions, she started out with the intention of visiting some museum or picture gallery, but always it was as if some magic power was drawing her towards those dingy streets, with their stench and their dirt, and their smell of cookery, where the poor of Rome were preparing their unceremonious dinners out-of-doors. Perhaps, indeed, she may have felt

that there was something in common between those gloomy localities and her own joyless life.

She was greatly attracted by one grim-looking palace, situated at a particularly dingy, dirty spot, in the neighbourhood of the Ghetto. A terrible deed had once been perpetrated in this palace. Its owner, that famous Cenci, so noted for his depravity, had fallen in love with Beatrice, the daughter of his first marriage, and persecuted her with his shameful desires. The whole family rose against the mad old villain, and, under the influence of her brothers and her step-mother, Beatrice poisoned her father. The crime was discovered, Beatrice was imprisoned, made a full confession, and was executed.

Having heard by chance that a famous portrait of Beatrice Cenci, the work of Guido Reni, is preserved at the Palazzo Barberini, Irene went to see it. She expected to see a queenly, tragic beauty, and found, instead, a simple girl, almost a child, in the very springtime of life—an innocent young soul to whom love and passion can as yet have

had no meaning. The artist has represented her in prison, dressed in the white prisoners' attire. Her little face is worn and drawn through sleepless nights, her beautiful eyes are red with tears, her little childish lips are swollen, just as all children's lips are swollen when they cry. The whole touching little face seemed to say quite clearly: "Yes—I am a criminal! Everyone tells me that I must pay for my crime with my life; that I must leave the lovely world that I love so much, leave the sunshine and the birds and the flowers, and go away into a cold tomb. What can I do? I have no strength to protest! But you, who will live instead of me, do not curse poor Beatrice! Love her! Pity her!"

Irene's eyes filled with tears as she looked at this martyred child, and she hid her face under her veil to hide her emotion. Other visitors to the Palazzo Barberini were also weeping and trying to conceal their tears.

"You are revenged, little Beatrice!" thought Irene. "Thousands are weeping at your sad fate, and are cursing your tyrants."

Irene soon became known in her *pension* as the tourist who had been living in Rome for three months and had not seen the Forum. All the Englishwomen in the house, deeply shocked at this omission, persuaded, implored, and at last forcibly dragged her there. From that moment, the charms of the mediæval city vanished for her, and she lost herself entirely in the antique world.

The weather was warm and sunny. The colossal walls of ruined ancient palaces and shrines, that must surely have been built for giants, stood out in relief against the blue sky. The silence was intense, the Roman season had not yet begun. Unknown crowds of English travellers had not yet descended from the Swiss mountains, nor sailed across the waters from Egypt. Irene felt quite at home among the ruins. She wandered for days among the ruins of the Forum and the Palatine, trying to imagine the life of the past, when the sun shone down not on the crumbling stones before her but on a world of glistening marble and pagan luxury; when

the immense sculptured gods, sheltered at present in the galleries of the Vatican, rose on their pedestals high above the heads of the gorgeous crowd with its classic draperies and its garlands of flowers, worshipping, offering sacrifices, burning incense. What a beautiful, gay, triumphant picture! Why did it all end? What could have driven these people away from their beloved green hills, down to the unhealthy banks of the Tiber and those dirty, dark alleys? And why are people now in their turn moving away from these alleys and returning to the hills and the sunshine, and a new, healthier life?

For the first time the thought occurred to Irene that the world, like each individual human being, must gradually pass through all the different periods of life. First, the early years, with their faltering steps and their uncertain memory. Then, at about five years old, the beginning of gay, happy, early childhood, white raiment, crowns and garlands and flowers, dance and song and laughter and summer-time. Dolls are indispensable at this age—modelled of clay, hewn out of stone,

carved in wood, at first very primitive and clumsy like those of the Egyptians, then always more and more lifelike, and finally perfected by the Greeks. And like a child who, having made itself a rag doll, takes it seriously and endows it with all sorts of qualities, so the Greeks and Romans place the gods they have made on pedestals, and call them Jupiter the terrible, Venus the passionate, Amor the little rogue, Minerva the wise, etc.

They dance around their gods with the careless gaiety of childhood; they love gorgeous processions, banquets, chariot-racing, and gladiators' fights for life or death, upon which they look with laughter, since pity is to them, as to all children, a thing unknown.

But time passes, and the child grows older. New ideas and requirements awaken in him; games and gaiety lose their interest. He grows pensive, pale, and thin, and he feels the need of suffering and tears. Irene remembered how, at the age of seven, she had suddenly experienced a great desire to fast during all the seven weeks of Lent. Pale,

fragile child as she had been, such privation had weakened her terribly; but incredible as it may seem, with a strength gleaned Heaven knows from where, she had actually held out to the end! She remembered also certain religious pilgrimages in the small provincial town, near which she had sometimes passed the summer with her father. Many a time in the torrid heat of a sultry July day had she walked for four or five hours through clouds of dust, along a rough, uneven road, in a procession behind an ikon, returning home half dead with fatigue, but unable to sleep, through sheer religious exaltation. Her thoughts, too, wandered back to the neighbouring convent, whither she had often gone to pray, and where, having attended vespers, she had sometimes stood through the whole night in prayer, soaring on the wings of a religious ecstasy, and feeling no fatigue. Her young soul had needed these raptures, fasts, and prayers. It had needed also the food of legends, and the more wonderful, the more supernatural these legends the dearer had they grown to her

imagination. Her mind had acknowledged no logic, and had needed none.

Did not the same thing happen to the world in the Middle Ages, that period of Humanity's later childhood? Christianity, or rather its rites and ceremonies (since its real meaning was unattainable to these children), was accepted with enthusiasm, because these rites and ceremonies exactly answered the requirements of the age: ecstasy, martyrdom, torture rapturously borne, naïve and lovely legends. Humanity would have no more of dolls and toys, and wrathfully destroyed the statues of the gods. Later on, in more recent times, those same people tenderly and lovingly collected the broken fragments of the statues and preserved them in their museums as cherished remembrances of childhood. It is thus that a grown-up man will pay a large sum for a broken doll, or for a faded coloured print that amused him in his early days.

Just as modelling is the heritage of babyhood, so painting is the delight of childhood. First come naïve little drawings, like the work of the Primitives, in which the figures of

saints of high religious rank are made twice as large as those of their inferiors, or like the pictures of Perugino and his school, in which the infant Christ is depicted wearing a coral ornament similar to those put round the necks of Italian children to save them from the evil eye!

Day by day, art develops and grows more perfect, reaching its apotheosis almost simultaneously in all the countries of Europe. Yet in all their magnificence and perfection, something naïve and childlike remains even in the works of the great masters. They draw pictures from the life of Christ, for instance, with background and accessories of the Middle Ages. They represent some Pope in all his Catholic vestments and with his papal tiara kneeling humbly before the Virgin, with the Child in her arms. They are not in the least disturbed by the thought that if a Roman Pope exists at all, it is only because this Christ Child grew up, and because His Apostles founded the Church. Their childish mind does not occupy itself with such contradictions, and Michael Angelo gives to the

world his famous Pièta, a magnificent marble group, in which the Virgin Mother is younger than her Son.

The defenceless child, unable to revenge himself on his tyrants and tormentors, loves to console himself with dreams of how the Divine Power—God and His angels, the Archangel Michael with a sword in his hand—will descend from heaven to help him. The wicked will be burnt in hell, and he, the offended and insulted one, will receive his reward in Paradise. Had he not this dream and this consolation, life would indeed be too heavy a burden.

But the child grows up, and reaches adolescence. He stands on the threshold of life, and the school-bench is left behind him. School has taught him but little—a few facts and some elementary information. But he has learnt to reason logically, and to examine the solid foundations on which the world rests. He begins to apply his logic to everything, and when he approaches religion, doubt trembles in his soul. The absurd improbability of the legends of the

Middle Ages disgusts him, and at the same time he is obsessed by the fear of remaining without a religion, a fear which has been inculcated into his mind by his entire upbringing. Calm and cold-blooded people think it all out, and become confirmed Atheists. Not so, however, those others with fervent, burning souls! Poor Tolstoy, in the wrath of his old age, destroys and insults the very elements on which he has founded and formed his life, and, having insulted them, goes to church as before, prays humbly among beggars, throws himself into a monastery, and dies of despair on the highway.

How many such martyrs are there in our days! With tears and sobs they fall on their knees, stretch forth their hands to Heaven, and cry from the depths of their souls: "God! show me some miracle that I may again believe in Thee! It is only through Thy wonders and miracles worked in the early days of Christianity that people turned to Thee and believed. Why were these early Christians dearer to Thee than I? I love thee; it is hard for me to tear myself

away from Thee! A miracle, a miracle, I beseech Thee! I will then believe *anything*, even what is against all reason and logic—only come to my help I implore Thee! Give me a sign or a miracle!"

But there are no more miracles, and death and despair enter like iron into the soul of the sufferer.

III

LIKE most Roman *pensions*, that in which Irene was staying was teeming with old maids of all nationalities. There must be some mysterious wind that blows them from all corners of the earth to the Eternal City. They go there in the hope of finding peace and spiritual rest, and their hope is almost always justified. What wonder indeed? For Rome is not a town; it is a picturesque cemetery, glorified by a golden sunset. On active, life-loving people it produces a gloomy impression; but to those who let life slip past them this cemetery is dear and precious. In other towns these lifeless people feel strange and out of place; the storm and stress, the feverish rush of life in a modern city shocks and angers them. In Rome one cannot think either of the present or the

future. One's thoughts linger in the past, and one is interested only in those who have long ago crumbled into dust in their graves.

Irene did not like old maids. She saw in these "brides of Christ" something incomplete, something eternally expectant. She avoided their society, and associated preferably with married women, calling herself jokingly an "old bachelor," an appellation that struck her as less disagreeable than the more usual one, which she refused to admit.

However, having unavoidably come into contact with most of her fellow visitors at the *pension*, she discovered that the maiden ladies of Rome were unlike their sisters elsewhere. They had peculiarly bright, gay, sometimes even radiant faces. Irene also noticed that between four and five o'clock in the afternoon some of them daily began to show signs of agitation. They blushed, made attempts at personal elegance, smartened up their modest black dresses by the addition of a lace collar or a bunch of fresh violets, solicitously saw to the arrangements of their little tea-tables, and constantly threw im-

patient glances at the door. The anxiously expected guests always turned out to be severe and majestic Catholic priests, before whom the ladies were tremulously shy. Irene assumed that the latter were probably newly converted Catholics, and her supposition was confirmed by a charming middle-aged English lady of an impoverished but famous old family, to whom Irene felt greatly drawn. Lady Muriel related that she had, the previous year, during a stay with relations in Ireland, made the acquaintance of a Catholic priest, "a most remarkable man," and that now she was happy to say she had been converted to the Catholic faith.

"I had thought," she murmured, "that life was over for me, but now I see that it is only just beginning, and that happiness is before me. The Catholic faith is so warm, so tender, so consoling!"

After this, Irene observed the Fathers and their spiritual daughters with redoubled interest. She was particularly attracted to an old French Dominican, called Père Etienne. His mother had been an Italian, and he had

inherited from her the Roman type. "The face of a proud patrician," thought Irene to herself. Like all Romans, Père Etienne was severe and forbidding, but when he laughed, which happened often, and always unexpectedly, his face became astonishingly kind and sympathetic, and almost childlike.

Lady Muriel introduced him to Irene, and from her very first conversation with him Irene felt such a sympathy for Père Etienne, that, to her own astonishment, she poured out to him the whole story of her life, with all its doubts and fears and disappointments. The priest listened attentively, but evidently with disapproval, and when, in answer, he laughed a little at her faith—not the orthodox faith, of course, but her own personal ideas—Irene felt like a silly little girl who has received a scolding.

"You have invented this faith yourself," he said. "It has nothing in common with Christianity. You Russians are all revolutionaries. Your priests do not teach you the principal thing, the love and fear of God and of His divine wisdom and might. Your atti-

tude towards God is quite unceremonious. You make conditions and contracts with Him as if He were a simple mortal. You have not advanced far beyond the ideas of your fellow-countrymen the Samoyedes, who first make sacrifices to their wooden gods and then beat them if they do not grant their prayers. When you Russians think you are passing from Orthodoxy to Catholicism, you are actually passing from paganism to Christianity."

"And where did you get the notion," he asked on another occasion, "that Christ promised His followers happiness in this life? On the contrary, Christ said repeatedly, '*My kingdom is not of this world.*' And, indeed, how could He reign here, among the pitiful creatures who people this earth, worms that strive only for empty, worldly pleasures, and cannot raise their eyes to the stars? Were He to appear anew among them, with His mild humility and saintliness, would the vulgar mind understand Him? No; our present-day Christians would laugh Him to scorn, and though they would not, perhaps, lead Him to Golgotha, they would certainly turn away

with a mocking smile. The kingdom of Christ is indeed beyond the grave, in another and more perfect world, to be attained only by purified souls who, already during their lifetime, have renounced earthly joys, and, by means of meditation, fasting, and prayer, have conquered the body, and their lower natures. Great joy and happiness awaits them in Heaven, and it is thither, my daughter, that your hopes must be directed. It is in the Kingdom of the Future that you must expect justice, and not in this vain world, from which but few will succeed in saving their souls."

The priest spoke with enthusiasm. His face shone with the light of inspiration. It was as though his eyes already saw the bliss of Christ's kingdom and those Heavenly joys of which he was so firmly convinced.

His words made a great impression on Irene. Until that time, she had never thought much about the future life. "Why trouble oneself," her common sense had argued, "about something that no one has ever seen? What must be, will be, and premature curiosity is useless."

Now, however, hearing these burning words of Père Etienne, she involuntarily thought to herself: "Is it possible that he really believes what he says?" And at the same time, she felt that the inspired enthusiasm of the kind old priest was beginning to influence her. Like most people of our day, Irene was interested in hypnotism, and it had not infrequently, in moments of despair, occurred to her to appeal for help to some famous hypnotist. She had been restrained only through fear of the consequences that might accrue from putting herself under the power of a perfect stranger. Supposing, having cured her of her gloomy state of mind, he should turn her into a criminal, and make her send an murder?

Now, however, looking into the noble face of the old priest, Irene understood and felt that he could lead her along the right path. Oh! if he could succeed in giving her back her former faith! He had converted other poor girls. And what happiness shone from their pale faces!

Irene caught at Père Etienne as a drowning man at a straw. It is thus that a man

suffering from an incurable disease flies to some quack or self-styled magician, gazes excitedly at mysterious herbs, and is already half assured that in them, and only in them, lies salvation. As for Père Etienne, the kind-hearted old man enthusiastically and zealously threw himself into the work of saving Irene's soul, and arranging her life.

"You are deeply mistaken," he assured her, "when you think that you have lost time uselessly, and have lived your life in vain. On the contrary, you have achieved much. You have passed through all your troubles with a pure heart. You have not made compromises with your conscience. You have looked on sadly while goodness and justice suffered, and sin was loaded with honours; but the idea has never occurred to you—as it does, alas! to many—that if sin is so successful, why not join its followers? You have resisted the temptation of such a thought. Your soul was dearer to you than the glitter of worldly success. You struggled with wicked thoughts, and emerged victoriously from the struggle. This is a great happiness, my daughter.

Thank God for giving you a strong will and a pure heart. It is a sign that you are one of His chosen ones. But you must not stop halfway. Throw off that spirit of despair! Forget all earthly cares! Draw yourself apart from the world and its ways, and consecrate yourself to God. It is necessary for you, without losing more time, to enter a convent."

"A convent?" exclaimed Irene.

"Yes, a convent. You need silence and rest. With your nature, life will always perturb and dismay you. You do not understand that the triumph of the wicked is temporary, and that they are all on the eve of their undoing. You are unable to realize this. It is necessary for you to cut yourself off once and for all from every contact with them, to withdraw yourself into silence, and to occupy yourself with prayer and the reading of sacred books. You are proud to call yourself a Christian, but do you intimately know the Holy Writ? Have you often in your life read the Gospel? Be sincere—confess!"

Irene was obliged to confess, with a blush, that she had never once read it through in

its entirety, and had contented herself with what religious instruction she had received at school, and with the extracts from the Gospel that she had heard read out at church.

"There! That's just it. I had foreseen that," exclaimed the priest. "And yet it is only on reading and studying the Gospel that many things become clear. Read it, and a divine peace will steal into your heart. This great Holy Book will take, for you, the place of all others. Day by day, your former despair will be replaced by hope, and your soul will be filled with joy and rapture. You have suffered agonies of doubt, and you well know how unbearable they are. Now you stand on the threshold of that incomparable bliss that only true faith can give. Et Dieu viendra causer avec vous, ma fille. Vous serez une de ses élues, et Il vous honorera de Sa Parole. Remember the elect in the Bible, who were found worthy of intercourse with God, but who nevertheless remained human."

"But how can I?" said Irene reflectively. "Leave the world? Leave all human ties

and associations for ever? But that is terrible!"

"What has that world, what have those human ties given you? Can you call to mind a single hour, a single moment of real happiness, even the shadow of happiness?"

Irene had to admit the absence even of that shadow.

"There! You see it yourself. You are afraid of a convent; but, do you know? you have been a nun for a long time."

Irene opened her eyes wide.

"Yes; it is so. Look round at your own life. You live virtuously, you hardly associate with men at all. Balls and theatres have long ceased to interest you. You dress in dark colours, and you yourself told me only recently that you eat very little meat, but prefer living mostly on vegetable diets. You have no specially near and dear relations, and feel a contempt even for your country. What, then, can attach you to the world?"

"Really—I don't know. Liberty, independence——"

"Yes; but in a convent, also, you will re-

tain the liberty to think, to read, to enjoy and love nature—and your requirements do not go beyond this. If, for instance, you were in love, and were dreaming of someone, this would be a great obstacle to convent life, and I should, in such a case, be the first to dissuade you from it. But I believe such is not the case?"

And Père Etienne gazed scrutinizingly into her face.

"Oh! you can set your heart at rest about that," laughed Irene. Men never played a great part in my life, and lately I have left off paying any attention to them at all. Besides, I really don't think I have any temperament."

"Perhaps you may be greatly mistaken!" The exclamation fell from the lips of Père Etienne accidentally. He was evidently provoked at his own careless words, and hastened to add that he had little acquaintance with Northern natures.

"But," he continued, "if man's love does not attract you, that is evidently a special grace of God, and it shows His particular mercy to you. Now is the time to flee to a convent,

while yet no human influence can disturb your peace. A late love would be a great misfortune for you. To be happy in the married state, one must enter it in early youth, before the character of the girl is completely formed. Only on these conditions does the young wife submit to all the requirements of married life, and grow gradually accustomed to them. She understands the character of her husband, adjusts herself to it, and so finds her happiness. You, having passed all your youth on coldly polite terms with men, have estranged yourself too much from them. You know nothing about their characters, and neither they nor you could ever give happiness, one to the other. There would only be mutual misunderstanding and great suffering. Pray that this cup may be for ever removed from you."

"Oh! I assure you, the question does not interest me in the least. Absence of faith troubles me infinitely more. How can I enter a convent, when I do not, perhaps, believe what is most important of all?"

Père Etienne smiled indulgently.

"Faith," he answered, "like everything else in the world, is not given to us all at once, but only after long and patient effort. Carry out your monastic duties, go to church and pray at the given times, read sacred books, and, little by little, faith will penetrate into your heart."

"But, allow me! How is this? Do you advise me to pray at first mechanically, almost without believing?" asked Irene incredulously. "But that would be hypocrisy, a mockery of religion!"

"Do not children begin by praying mechanically? This does not prevent their praying consciously and sincerely later on. It will be so with you also. Do not let this dismay you."

Père Etienne did not hurry her to decide; but the thought of taking the veil had sown its seed in Irene's heart.

"Yes," she thought. "Père Etienne is right. After a certain age, it is best for unmarried women to bury themselves in convents. In the world, everything only irritates and tortures their souls: little children, with

their adorable little faces, happy lovers, gazing tenderly into each other's eyes, passionate music singing of love, all this happy, earthly life, in which they have no place. In a convent, on the other hand, far from worldly books, papers, news, rumours, their nerves are gradually quieted, and a regular life and untroubled sleep cures their tortured souls.

A little earlier, the idea of being converted to the Roman faith would have frightened Irene; but, having lived a few months in Rome, she had grown to love the Catholic church and clergy. From the first days of her arrival, she had been interested in the students of the various theological colleges and seminaries, whom, in their picturesque costumes, some scarlet, some mauve, some black with coloured belts, one meets in Rome at every step. Irene loved to observe their intelligent faces, and their attentive, scrutinizing glances.

It seemed strange to her, at first, to see these future priests on the Pincio at the fashionable hour, contemplating elegant ladies in splendid carriages, or to meet them at teas and dinners in the fashionable hotels. But,

on thinking this over, she came to the conclusion that this, to her, new and unaccustomed Catholic system of educating the priesthood was perfectly rational. In order to wield an influence over the great social world, it is indispensable to know its thoughts and ideals, and to share its manners, its bringing up, and its education.

In their free time the students see Rome, visit museums and picture-galleries, learn to distinguish one school of art from another, and to decipher the inscriptions and hieroglyphics on ancient sarcophagi. The theological colleges belong to various countries, and among the students—Englishmen, Germans, Frenchmen and Poles—are many people of good society, and sons of famous aristocratic families.

Irene reflected with some bitterness that only in Russia is the guardianship of religion left in the hands of grasping peasants. The very name of a seminarist is connected, in Russia, with the idea of coarseness. The education, the mental development of the priesthood is on the lowest

level, and social life is entirely unknown to them. A youth who has barely finished his course at the seminary, is hurriedly ordained, and rushed off to some village in the depths of the country, where the sheep of his fold, rough, wild peasants, teach their young pastor to drink. Should he have the luck to be sent to a large town, his knowledge of life and of social ways and customs is so small that he can do no good whatever to his parishioners. On the contrary, he irritates them by clumsy tactlessness when hearing confessions, by wild sermons, and an unceremonious attitude towards the holiest things. He turns his church into a shop, where he sells ikons, candles, calendars, and countless other trifles, from which he tries to make as good an income as he can. Sick at heart, Irene remembered how priests at home, while holding out the cross to be kissed by worshippers before leaving church, continued mumbling a special service they were supposed to be celebrating after Mass in honour of some saint, standing the while with their

backs to the ikon of the said saint, and hardly troubling to give the responses to the co-officiating deacon. She remembered also a scene witnessed at a service before a miracle-working ikon, in a provincial monastery, where the drunken priest and the equally drunken deacon had quarrelled and abused each other in the intervals between the prayers. Unhappily, indeed, such and similar occasions were none too rare, and they rankled in Irene's mind, wounding her heart and shaking the foundations of her respect for Orthodoxy. Just before her departure from Russia, she had happened to be present at a little improvised religious meeting arranged at the house of a friend for a small group of schoolgirls of the higher social circles. They all arrived looking very excited and inspired, and their little youthful faces wore serious and attentive expressions. How much holiness and goodness could at such a moment have been sown in those innocent young souls by an enlightened pastor! And how did the Russian priest, invited to speak to these children, use the occasion? The

serious, solemn old veteran mounted the platform and spoke for a whole hour about the advisability of eating during Lent, only the particular kind of butter prescribed for such periods, and the sinfulness of eating the ordinary kind!

Irene had watched the faces of the listening girls, and had seen reflected on them surprise, uncertainty, and at last flushes of indignation. They had come for a piece of bread, and had been given a stone.

Nothing of this kind was to be seen in Roman churches. The priests officiated with reverence at the altars, assisted by their little acolytes, while the rôle of the deacon and the sub-deacons and the choir was carried out by the congregation itself. Seated on chairs, with prayer-books in their hands, the people followed the service, gave the responses, and sang the prayers. Sermons were preached by gifted and eloquent preachers, usually in the evening, quite apart from any service, and these sermons always drew large and eager crowds of listeners.

In Russia, Irene had gained the impres-

sion that the Catholic Church was nothing so much as dry and scholastic, stifling all individual thought, and destroying all culture. In Rome, this erroneous idea was soon dissipated, and she realized that Catholicism had, on the contrary, through all the centuries of its existence, faithfully served the cause of progress. The Roman Popes had all been connoisseurs of art. They had surrounded themselves with great painters and sculptors, had given them orders, and had encouraged them in every possible way. They had collected and religiously preserved old books and manuscripts, had organized extensive excavations and researches, and had decorated the halls of the Vatican and the Lateran with the antique statues they had discovered.

Catholic schools and colleges had educated numbers of highly talented people. Even that famous negator of Christianity, Renan, was also a pupil of one of these institutions. The Catholic system of education does not stifle the intelligence—on the contrary, it gives freedom and encouragement to the youthful

imagination. Until now, in spite of every kind of persecution, monks and nuns are looked upon in Western Europe as the best and most capable educators of the young. They put their whole souls into their work, and receive in return the love and respect of their pupils.

Irene thought of her own spiritual isolation, her loneliness and despair, during the old days at home in Petrograd. She had had nowhere to go, no one to whom to apply for comfort and advice, and each and everyone of her acquaintances had been as lonely and spiritually friendless as herself. In Russia, she had considered the accepted cold relations between the faithful and their spiritual fathers as perfectly natural; now, she had seen and appreciated the value of very different conditions.

Père Etienne was an old man, and suffered severely from asthma, so that to reach Irene's room on the second floor was no small matter, and left him out of breath for some time after his arrival there. In spite of this, however, he considered it his duty to go and see her

every day, to comfort her, to dissipate her doubts, and to renew her courage. It was her soul that was precious to him, and he exerted all his powers to save this soul, and to lead it into the right channel.

All this astonished Irene. She had seen in her father's house how learned men, almost all, as a rule ended by being Atheists and by regarding all religions as childish sentimentalities.

How could these Catholic priests with their extensive education and intellectuality believe in naïve Christian legends? She had imagined that the Catholic Church had long ago abandoned these legends, but that having in its cleverness realized what centuries are needed for the transforming of an old religion into a new one, had allowed them to remain unrefuted, and to continue answering, as they did most satisfactorily, the spiritual necessities of millions of people. There are, of course, naturally virtuous souls who will always remain honest and true, and will always hate sin, to whatever religious opinions or negations they may adhere. But are there many

such? The majority of the human race is still so uncultured that religion is the only means of keeping them more or less on the right path—religion, the fear of hell, and the hope of heaven! And so, thought Irene, the Catholic Church had decided, for the time being, to pretend to believe everything; and, for the happiness of the people, for the sake of law and order and culture, to resign not a single legend, nor a single dogma. And Irene, with all her heart, justified and applauded this magnificent deception!

She had a great wish to see the Pope, and one day mentioned this desire to Père Etienne. To her astonishment, however, he answered coldly that this would be too great an honour for her, and that he was not yet sufficiently convinced of the sincerity of her faith to consider such an honour justifiable.

"But," murmured Irene timidly, "I am surely not asking for anything so extraordinary? His Holiness receives hundreds of Englishwomen and Americans every week."

"Yes!" exclaimed the old man indignantly, "and this is indeed a great abuse. These

foreigners manage to get received, through sheer curiosity, and in order to be able to say to their friends at home: 'We have been to Rome, and we have seen both the Pope and an aristocratic Italian fox-hunt. Both were very interesting.' Don't you see that for us—for true believers—this is an insufferable insult?"

Irene felt confused and embarrassed. When, however, a short time later some friends offered her a ticket for one of the great papal functions, she could not resist the temptation, and, saying nothing to Père Etienne, accepted, and decided to go to the Vatican.

IV

Excited anticipation kept Irene awake during the whole night previous to the great occasion. She rose with the dawn, and laid ready her black dress and black lace veil, the traditional costume of all pilgrims received by the Pope.

The ceremony was to take place at eleven o'clock, but at ten Irene drove up to the Vatican, hoping to be one of the first to arrive. Alas! an extended line of carriages had already long been blocking the way to the Portone di Bronzo, and, advancing slowly one by one, setting down ladies in black lace and gentlemen in dress clothes. Like Irene, they had all counted on arriving first, and all contemplated, with undisguised astonishment, the dense crowd slowly making its way up the stairs. The predominating impression among this crowd was far less one of religious

emotion than of excited curiosity. There were many Americans and Germans, who had come to see a rare sight, in order to boast about it later on in their own countries. The eyes of these tourists sparkled with delight as they gazed at the papal guards, who, in their mediæval costumes and their peculiar hats, looked as if they had just stepped out of pictures, as indeed did also the papal lackeys, in cherry-coloured brocade, with silk stockings and buckled shoes.

Irene loved the Vatican. This mediæval fortress, with its numberless houses, towers, courtyards, cemeteries, and gardens appealed strongly to her imagination. She loved, perhaps most of all, the splendid halls with their frescoes and their beautiful antique statues. This, she thought, was *true* luxury, in comparison with which the luxury of modern palaces, with their commonplace silk-panelled walls and their carpets and pictures, grew pale and seemed almost vulgar. In the magnificent halls of the Vatican the walls and ceilings were covered with frescoes by Raphael and Michael Angelo,

and the ornaments consisted of antique porphyry sarcophagi, ancient mosaics, such as have never been equalled in more modern times, and colossal marble vases and fonts, excavated from ancient baths and shrines. Modern art has been able to add nothing to all these priceless treasures.

And now Irene was gazing with rapture at the frescoed walls of the immense Sala Clementina, into which, little by little, the extraordinarily mixed assemblage, whose like one can hardly meet anywhere, was making its way. There were foreigners shivering in furs; aristocratic Roman ladies in elegant black dresses, long white gloves, and family pearls; prelates; cardinals; nuns in white starched headdresses; Capucins in sandals, and with ropes round their waists; little girls in white dresses and lace veils, with curls framing their flushed, excited faces; officers of the papal guard; dominicans in white cloth cassocks; attachés of the various foreign embassies in gold embroidered uniforms—all this formed one heterogeneous, palpitating mass of humanity. The variety of the crowd

pleased and interested Irene. It struck her that all this was just as it should be in the Palace of the Roman Pontiff, the only sovereign who acknowledged neither rank nor position nor class distinctions, and who did not surround himself with a Chinese wall, guarded by a handful of privileged people, in no way more deserving than their fellows. "It is in most countries these privileged classes," thought Irene, "who by energetically pushing to a safe distance from the precints of the throne all who really work for the good of their country, always manage artificially to create enemies for their King." The Pope believed in a very different policy. He was accessible to everybody, without distinction of nationality, faith, or social position, and he was ready to receive and to bless everyone alike. Perhaps, indeed, it may be owing to this wise policy that no attempt has ever been made on his life, in spite of the fact that the Vatican employs neither spies nor secret guards. Such a Court, thought Irene, should have existed under Constantine the Great or Louis IX.

The ceremony of presenting consecrated candles to the Pope (*dei ceri benedetti*) was to take place in the neighbouring Sala del Trono. At one end of this lofty, narrow, frescoed hall stood, under a baldaquin, the golden throne of the Pope ; at the other end, a great crucifix supported by an angel. On either side of the central passage, kept clear by the Swiss guards, were long benches, on which were already seated various pilgrims, all trying to get as near as possible to the throne. The best places had already long been taken by clergy of all nationalities, with enormous opera-glasses and firm intentions to miss not the smallest detail of the interesting spectacle. Subdued excitement reigned supreme in the half-darkened hall, with its drawn red blinds and its sparse, electric lights. There was a hushed murmur of low-toned conversation—everyone spoke in a whisper, except, of course, the Americans, who exchanged silly little remarks and impressions in unceremonious, strident tones. A Frenchman, with a small pointed beard was, in a loud voice, relating to someone something

about an inn in Naples, where one could get excellent wine and macaroni. With the impudence of a dull-minded Atheist, he smacked his lips over various details, keenly enjoying the paradox contained in the mere fact of discussing such things at the Vatican.

Here and there in the crowd, however, could also be seen the rapturous faces of youthful priests and young girls. Full of religious exaltation, trembling with emotion, they kept their shining eyes fixed on the door before which stood the papal guards.

At last there was a wave of movement. The crowd rose, made as though it would fall on its knees, but thought better of the intention, and remained standing. Surrounded by his Court, His Holiness, in white raiment and a little white cap, passed to the throne, and, throwing a quick glance over the assemblage, took his place.

Along the central passage, between the benches, a procession of priests advanced, two and two, holding in their hands long painted tapers, covered with funny little

fringed extinguishers. They approached the throne, handed the tapers to attendants, fell on their knees, and kissed the Pope's ring. On the beautiful face of the Pontiff shone a radiant smile. He said a few words to each one, sometimes whispered in their ears, and often laughed. This was not the face of a mighty sovereign, but only that of a good, kind old man, who had long ago learnt that all sorrows, all dreams, all hopes, are soon over, and that life is short, and does not contain anything specially good or attractive. He was deeply sorry for all those expectant pilgrims, exciting themselves about nothing at all, awaiting Heaven knows what, and needlessly tiring themselves out; and all he could do was to help them with a kind word, a warm glance, and with the love that illumined his beautiful features. It seemed to Irene that, for the first time in centuries, a truly Christian pastor reigned in Rome, and one who in spirit resembled the first Christian apostles, the builders of the Church. What a striking contrast between this Pope and his surrounding Court! They, too, were all smil-

ing at the pilgrims; but what hypocrisy, what falseness and flattery, breathed in those smiles! Their crafty faces were cold and indifferent. For them, this ceremony was only one of the countless comedies in which they had constantly to play parts. Two of these papal courtiers, both still young and handsome, were obviously posing before the aristocratic Roman ladies, among whom they probably had admiring friends.

The ceremony lasted a long time. The tapers, in the hands of the priests, moved along in endless procession. Everyone was tired and hot, all faces were flushed. The courtiers around the throne left off smiling, and made no attempt to hide their fatigue. Only the Pope alone smiled as warmly and caressingly as before upon each man who knelt before him. For him, this was no ceremony, this was a human service, which he rendered joyfully.

At last, the final tapers were presented. His Holiness rose, blessed the bowing crowd, and left the hall. There was a general rush for the door. Close to Irene, a young French

girl was heatedly disputing some point with her mother.

"Mais, il t'a donné sa bénédiction, ma chère," persuaded the mother. "He has blessed us all. What more do you want?"

But the girl was not consoled, and only looked sadly at the door, behind which the Pope had disappeared.

Irene understood: she, too, felt sad at the thought that she would never again see that beautiful Christian smile.

V

The same evening, Irene announced to Père Etienne that all her doubts were at an end, and that she had decided to take the Veil. She would now only ask him to find her a suitable convent.

"There are many orders of nuns in Rome," answered the Father, reflectively, "each with a particular aim and purpose. There are sisters who nurse the sick, and others who educate children. It seems to me that the order most suited in your case is that of the Sœurs Mauves. They lead very secluded lives, pray a great deal, and keep watch, night and day, over the Holy Sacrament. You can see them every day at Vespers in their Church of Santa Petronilla in the Via Gallia.

Trembling with emotion, Irene turned her steps towards this convent, half afraid of her

own first impression. When she entered, the church was almost empty. A few stray old men and old women were dreaming on chairs, waiting for the service. Like most modern Roman churches, Santa Petronilla was ablaze with gilding and profusely decorated with pictures. On either side, up above, were galleries of quite theatrical appearance, painted mauve and white, the colours of the convent. A transparent, high, carved partition divided the church into two parts: the one nearest the entrance for the public, the other, nearest the altar, for the nuns. At present, all was dark and empty, only one feeble taper was burning on the altar.

Irene took a seat in the first row, quite close to the partition, and prepared to contemplate her future surroundings. It was a long time before the silence was broken by the slow, dull sound of the church bells. The altar was suddenly brightly illuminated, and a procession of nuns appeared through the door. They entered in couples, knelt for a moment, one couple at a time, before the altar, and then slowly, gracefully,

with soundless footsteps, made their way to their places. They were dressed in white robes with long trains, and wide mauve borders. White veils hid their faces, and fell at the back in graceful folds over their trains. These veils were so thick, that it was impossible to distinguish the ages of their wearers. With soft white hands, the nuns clasped the golden crosses on their breasts, as they slowly sank into their places, threw back their veils, and, directing their gaze to the altar, remained immovable in the most graceful of poses. Somewhere in the distance an organ began to play, and an invisible choir sang a prayer, or, rather, a beautiful Italian operatic air.

Something long forgotten stirred restlessly in Irene's heart. "But these are my vestal virgins!" she thought, with a thrill of emotion —those beloved vestal virgins that had always so deeply appealed to her imagination, and whose disappearance she had so often regretted. It seemed to her that no reforms and no amount of progress could ever give back to women the high position occupied in ancient Rome by the handmaidens of the

goddess Vesta. Everyone had bowed before them; with a movement of the hand they had the power to pardon prisoners condemned to death; they were present at all ceremonies, games, and performances, and formed the principal ornament of the Courts of the Roman Emperors. And here, suddenly, Irene had found them again, less mighty and less dazzling, perhaps, but more mysterious instead, and more poetical.

The service continued, and the church gradually filled with people: elegant ladies, dirty workmen, little old men and little old women, even small children brought there by religious nurses. They all joined in the hymns, and sang with the nuns. There was something strange and touching in the mingling of all those hoarse, old, untrained voices with the soft music of the choir, descending, like the song of angels, from the mauve gallery. Many of the worshippers were weeping bitterly, on their knees. From time to time the singing stopped, and one of the nuns, opening a prayer-book, read a prayer, in a soft, melodious voice. Irene watched her

future companions with great emotion. They seemed so dignified, so refined, so completely *comme il faut;* life among them, indeed, promised to be charming. Nothing in their habits and manners could ever jar on her or shock her. She remembered, with a shudder, the Russian nuns who wander from village to village, collecting money for the building of churches, lifting their dirty dresses high, and showing their equally dirty, red, rough, thick peasant legs.

The service came to an end. Slowly, gracefully, the white dignified figures of the Sœurs Mauves floated away and disappeared. In their places appeared several fat, active little nuns, in short black robes, with enormous mauve bows and little white veils. They extinguished the candles, running from one candlestick to another, never forgetting their reverend genuflexion when passing the altar.

"Serving-women," thought Irene, and the thought pleased her that she would not, even in the convent, cease to be a lady accustomed to the services of a maid. For a

moment she was ashamed of the thought, but immediately justified herself: "Of course all idea of dirty work is impossible in those long snowy robes, those white slippers, and floating, shimmering veils!"

It was a still, warm evening, and the stars were beginning to show themselves in the dark blue sky when Irene left the church. There was peace in her soul as she breathed in the balmy Southern air. "Thank God!" she said to herself. "At last I have found my vocation. What matter if I do not sufficiently believe? The principal thing is to sing, to read prayers, and to touch the hearts of all those unhappy, suffering people, who come to pray with the nuns, believing in their purity and saintliness."

Almost all unmarried women of a certain age suffer secret torments from the fact that they have actually no place in society. Irene was no exception to this rule, and she was happy at the thought that now, at last, she might be of some use in the service of humanity. To have a special uniform—an idea always dear to the Russian heart—was

also a great attraction. In imagination she tried on the picturesque dress of those modern vestal virgins, making up her mind to be graceful, to float about like a white spirit, to sing, and to read prayers melodiously.

From that day, Irene never missed a single evening service in the Via Gallia. The nuns were inaccessible to outsiders, and no stranger was ever admitted to the convent—an additional fact to play upon Irene's fancy. The convent stood on a hill. Luxurious palms and fragrant Roman pines leaned over its high garden walls, and Irene saw, in imagination, the small, interior courtyard, with its covered verandah, its slim, carved columns, its murmuring fountain, its Southern foliage and flowers. She pictured to herself the early morning; she heard the measured tones of the melodious convent bells calling the sisters to prayer; then she thought of the evening, of a golden Roman sunset, a purple sky, faint, glistening stars, and the *Ave Maria*. . . .

How beautiful, how poetical, seemed her future life, with its prayers, its meditations,

its rapturous exaltation, its Gospel-readings, its soft singing, its incense! An enchanted existence in a Southern clime, a sweet, mystical dream, and then—death, followed by a probable awakening to some new and glorious life!

The news of Irene's decision created a great sensation in her *pension*. Although nothing was definitely settled between herself and Père Etienne, everyone else knew which order she had chosen, and on which day she was to be received. Some even went so far as to name the dressmaker who was making her convent robes. They all constantly stared at Irene, and pointed her out to their visitors.

One afternoon, she happened to accompany Père Etienne to the hall-door, at the hour when the complicated business of afternoon tea was in progress. Small bamboo tables were scattered about between Chinese screens and immense palms, and at one of these tables, some distance away from the door, sat a goodnatured, pleasant little Russian old lady, giving tea to a fellow-

countryman, a tall, handsome, energetic, young-looking Russian of about forty, with an occasional grey thread in his thick, dark hair. The old lady, with a whispered remark, pointed Irene out to her visitor. He looked round with some curiosity, and then muttered, with a frown :

" What is this stupid, new fashion ? Our women seem unable to look at a Roman priest without renouncing Orthodoxy !"

VI

A MAGNIFICENT January moonlight night had wrapped the world in its silence. Rome was nestling in the warm, pale blue air; there were fantastic shapes and shadows everywhere; the magic of the darkness had wiped out all contrasts between ruins and modern buildings, and everything alike, churches, houses, streets, seemed unreal and enchanted.

Most beautiful of all, however, was the Colosseum, towards which Irene turned her steps that night. Like all foreigners, she had considered it her duty to see this famous ruin by moonlight, and had on a previous occasion visited it for this purpose, in company with several of the tourists staying at her *pension*. Their commonplace expressions of delight, however, had entirely spoilt the impression for her, and this time, tempted

by the clear moonlight, she decided to go alone, and enjoy the unique beauty of the Colosseum in solitude.

Fate was kind to Irene. The enormous circus was entirely deserted but for the almost invisible shadows of a few distant tourists, and the outline of a tall man standing at the entrance, wrapt in admiration of the grandiose spectacle. Irene had just seated herself on a stone, when suddenly out of the shadows, as though from nowhere, sprang the figure of an old guide, declaiming pathetically, and addressing himself to Irene :

" Voici ce fameux Colisée, ce cirque épatant, où les malheureux chrétiens——"

Irene was so annoyed, that she cried out, and even shook her umbrella at him. The guide cut short his eloquence, and turned away grumbling. Irene suddenly felt ashamed. She followed the poor old man and offered him money, but the proud Roman refused. Cursing Irene and all her relations and friends, and expressing the wish that her first-born might be burnt in hell, he withdrew with dignity.

Irene turned round. The tall Russian had been watching the scene with interest. They looked at each other, and both involuntarily laughed.

"What a good thing you drove away that old parrot!" said the stranger. "These guides simply spoil Italy for foreigners. I am sure tourists would willingly pay a tax for their benefit, only to be rid of them, and to be allowed to admire Italy's treasures in peace. I am always positively wild with rage when they begin to declaim, and to offer me elementary information that we all acquired years ago at school!"

Irene listened sympathetically, and suddenly realized with astonishment that the stranger was addressing her in Russian. How could he have found out that she was Russian!

The speaker noticed her surprise, and smiled.

"I had the pleasure of seeing you in your *pension*," he explained, "I went there to see Anna Sergeievna Boutourina."

"Oh! Do you know Anna Sergeievna? Isn't she a charming old lady?"

"Very charming. I have known her since my childhood; I used to go and stay with her as a little boy. Allow me to introduce myself: Sergei Gzhatski, Marshal of the Nobility in the province of S——."

They began to speak of S——, and discovered mutual acquaintances. But their conversation soon came to a stop. The magic beauty of the night threw its enchantment over them. They mounted the steps of the amphitheatre, sat down on the steps, and remained silent, in admiration of the glorious scene. Pale blue clouds were floating above them, from time to time veiling the moon. The high walls, with their immense openings, stood out like enormous lace patterns against the clear sky. Through the gaps in the blocks of stone peeped cypresses and Roman pines; high on the third floor, alternately appearing and disappearing, shone a moving light, a torch, in the hands of a guide, leading a crowd of English tourists through all the corridors and tiers of the Colosseum. Irene gazed fixedly at this wavering light, and suddenly her thoughts wan-

dered back to ancient times, to the early years of Christianity.

The warm moon shone in those days, just as now, she dreamed; the little clouds floated across the same sky; the cypresses looked in at the same windows. The torches gleamed like this one, only there were many of them, and they moved not through the tiers and balconies, but in the arena, rising and falling, in the hands of Romans clad in togas and tunics. This afternoon the games beloved of Romans had taken place, and many Christians had been thrown to the wild beasts. The festive crowd of onlookers had left the circus, chattering gaily and animatedly, and hurried homeward to merry suppers. The wild beasts, having eaten sumptuously, are now sleeping in their cages. The night has fallen peacefully on Rome, and with the darkness there has appeared in the arena a silent assemblage; the friends and relations of to-day's martyred Christians. For large sums of money they have bought, from the keepers of the Colosseum, the right to take away the bodies of the vic-

tims. Stifling their sobs, silently, like shadows of mourning, they pass from one corpse to another, bending down, searching by the light of their torches for the remains of some dear one. Having found what they sought, they fall, with a dull cry, to the ground, and gaze with horror at the stiffened features. There, beside a torn white tunic, some long black tresses, and two soft, girlish hands, sits an old woman, richly but tastelessly dressed, and with blunt, plebeian features. She is swaying hopelessly from side to side, and, in a pitiful, wailing voice, is telling her sorrow to an old man, who listens sympathetically.

"She was our only one! Our one beloved treasure! Many children were born to us before her, but it was not Jupiter's will that they should grow up. They were all poor little mites, born thin and puny, and with big heads. They lived for about two years, tottered round the yard on their poor, weak little legs, and then died. Lydia was the last. At her birth she was so thin and fragile that we never hoped she would grow up. Besides, I was already turned forty, and my

old man was getting on for sixty; what sort of children can one expect to have at that time of life! But, somehow, the gods took pity on our lonely old age. Lydia began to improve and get strong. Ye gods! How we loved her and caressed her and spoiled her! Her father simply worshipped her, and strictly forbade me ever to punish her. For that matter there was never any reason to punish her, she was quiet and thoughtful, and always alone in a corner, away from other children. Even when nearly grown up, she never wanted girl friends. 'I want no one but you,' she would say, embracing us lovingly. She always sat at home, and could not be induced to join in any gaieties. She had only one passion—the Vestal Virgins. Often and often she went to gaze at them and admire them, weeping bitter tears because she was not one of them, and carrying flowers to the shrine of the goddess Vesta. We greatly feared, my old man and I, that she would never consent to marry. We longed to see our grand-children, and besides, we wanted an heir to carry on the

business. My old man is the best jeweller in Rome. All the great people give us orders, and our things are highly valued. My husband found a suitable son-in-law, also in the jeweller's business—but we did not dare to tell Lydia. She was so proud, and would never look at men. And oh! how beautiful she was! Pale, like marble, with her thin little face, her large, grey eyes, and her heavy dark tresses. All the young men were in love with her, but she would have nothing to say to any of them. Then, all of a sudden, those accursed Jews appeared. They used to live quietly on the other side of the Tiber, until one day when they all seemed to have become possessed. Over they came, swarms of them, telling some story of a new God of theirs, born somewhere in Palestine, and asking everyone to believe in Him. Dirty, miserable wretches, disgusting in their filthy rags, gesticulating, excited, really quite absurd. Beggars, you know, but with the pretensions of Emperors. Of course, old people only laughed at them. As if anyone would dream of changing his religion in

his old age! But the young people began to be interested, and to go to the Jews' meetings. Those miserable wretches spoke so passionately—just as if they really had seen a great new God! Lydia went once too, and came home all of a tremble with emotion. At first we were pleased, because her passion for the Vestal Virgins seemed to have cooled. But our joy was short-lived. She began to disappear for days and nights at a time, always praying with her Jews, and calling herself a Christian. My old man and I grew alarmed, and then, suddenly, began the persecution of Christians. At first we, of course, thought that only those good-for-nothing Jews would be persecuted, and we were very pleased, because we hated them. But the news spread that there was an order to catch all other Christians too. We lived in terror, expecting trouble every day. We did all we could to keep Lydia at home, but there, she would not even listen to us. 'We pray together,' was all she said, 'and we will die together.' One day, a month ago, she went to a secret meeting, and never returned. We

learned that she was in prison, we bribed the gaolers, and managed to see her. She was in a feverish state of rapture and exultation. 'Be happy for me,' she said; 'I shall see Christ, and be with Him for ever.' With bitter tears, we implored her to renounce this madness. Her old father and I, we fell on our knees before her—nothing helped! It was not only once that we went to her, nor twice, nor three times. What a fortune we spent on bribes! Though that, indeed, matters little. What do we want with riches now that we have no one to whom to leave them? One day, about a fortnight ago, we went to her. She was pale and faint, and in tears. She took us into a corner, away from the other prisoners, threw them furtive, frightened glances, and whispered: 'We are condemned to death. They are going to throw us to the wild beasts in the circus. It is terrible—oh! it is terrible!' She was shivering and sobbing. 'I cannot sleep at night—I always see a tiger, falling on me and tearing me to pieces. Save me! Save me! I will agree to anything now! But don't tell

the others, or they will despise me and laugh at me.' In wild haste we rushed off to our best client, the Senator Claudius Massimus. All day we sat in his atrium, waiting to be received. At last, in the evening, the Senator comes to us, hears us, and answers : 'Very well, my good old people, I will do what I can for you. Let your daughter only make a sacrifice to the gods, and publicly curse her past folly.' Hardly feeling our feet under us for joy and thankfulness, we rushed with our news to Lydia. But oh! misery! misery! In the meantime their chief priest had been to the prison, the wicked, accursed old villain! I don't know what he told them, but Lydia came out to us, beaming with happiness. 'I no longer need anything,' she said, embracing us. 'Thank you for your solicitude on my behalf, but however great your love may be for me, you cannot give me the joys that are prepared for me in Heaven.' We implored her, besought her all in vain. Lydia only laughed, and kissed us. We staggered home, and the same night my old man had a paralytic stroke. From that moment

I have not been able to leave him. To-day we have been together in silence, without moving from dawn till sunset. Do you know, do you understand, you merciless, pitiless daughter, all that we have suffered? Had you the right to buy for yourself eternal salvation at such a price? Oh! wicked, cruel, beloved one! When the sun had set, my old man gave me money, and said: 'Go and bring me all they have left us of Lydia.' So I have come, and have found her tattered tunic, and her scalp and hair, and her lovely hands, with the bracelets her father put on them when she was fifteen. Oh, ye gods, ye gods! Is it for this that we have brought her up and watched over her, and cared for her, that she should be a fairer sacrifice for the accursed Jews? Talk of mercy and love, and then take away from anguished parents their only joy, the light and mainstay of their old age! May they be accursed and thrice accursed, these demented, perverted villains, these murderers of our children!" And the old woman fell forward with a cry, on the tresses of the hapless Lydia.

Not far away from her sat a proud young beauty, in a luxurious gold-embroidered tunic, her eyes fixed on the head of a young handsome Roman. Large, slow teardrops followed each other down her face, but she did not notice them nor attempt to brush them away. She only threw herself, at intervals, on the bleeding corpse, embraced it with her soft arms, and passionately kissed the cold lips and the golden moustache.

"What have you done? What have you done? My adored, cruel husband! How could you leave me, forget my love, forget our happiness together? Were we all, your relations, your friends, your nearest and dearest, of so little import to you, that you could abandon us for the sake of a mad dream? How could you, a clever, well-bred noble Roman, fall under the influence of low, filthy slaves? They are all frantic about some wild idea, some frienzied vision, and *you*—*you* could believe them, and share their madness!

"Oh! What shall I do with my life without you? You took me, a young, careless,

innocent child, you taught me the happiness of love, and now you have pitilessly abandoned me! I pass whole days and nights in the remembrance of your caresses, I stretch out my hands, I grope for you in the dark, and I shall never find you again! Oh! How terrible, how incredible is this thought. Thousands, millions of people are born every day, but never again will the world see your like!

"Who is it that has dared, that has taken on himself the right to destroy that most splendid work of nature—man? You tried to console me with the assurance that your soul would live for ever; but of what use is your soul to me? I love your body, your eyes, your features. When I meet, in the street, someone who but slightly resembles you, I blush, and the blood rushes to my heart. Your irresistible smile, your charming laugh, maddened me with happiness! And now—all is over. You will never smile again, you will never look at me with your beloved blue eyes. To-morrow worms will begin to eat this flesh that is dearer to me than all else on earth, and I am powerless to prevent this outrage. Oh, ye

gods! How have I sinned, that I should have deserved to suffer so madly?

"Rather than this, why were you not untrue to me—why did you not go away, and love another? Terrible as this would have been, I should at least have known that you lived, that my eyes could look upon you. Secretly, in the darkness of the night, I could have come to gaze upon you, and this would have given me life.

"Oh! Why do we not know the future? Why does fate give us no warning? How much time I lost in idle gossiping with girl friends, in needless outings and amusements, while I might have spent this time in talking with you, in gazing at you, in enjoying your caresses!

"The moon will appear in the sky, the nightingales will sing, but you will not hear them. The sun will rise, but its rays will not penetrate into your cold tomb. Life at best is but short, and now you yourself, of your own free will, have deprived yourself prematurely of its joys.

"Oh! This terrible, meaningless life! I

am cold, I shiver, I cannot live in the world without you! All is pale, all is dark and tarnished around me. Nothing interests me, nothing pleases me. Alone! Alone! From now onwards, alone on this accursed earth."

And the unhappy one repeatedly kissed the dead body, passionately embraced it, beating her head upon the sand.

Irene clearly heard the groans, curses, and cries that re-echoed in the ancient circus. Tears fell from her eyes. She forgot where she was, and started when Gzhatski, having also for some time kept his eyes fixed on the arena, broke the silence by a sudden remark.

"May I ask you an indiscreet question?" he asked, turning sharply round, and facing his companion. "Is it really true that you have decided to be a traitor to your faith, and become a Roman Catholic?"

"Why a traitor?" retorted Irene, a little angrily. "Orthodox Russians and Catholics believe alike in the Gospel, and that is the principal thing. As to dogmas, they were all invented by the perverted intelligence of

crafty Byzantian Greeks, who did not understand the Gospel in the least, and dragged it down to their own level by eternal quibbling about words. Already, in my childhood, I studied with disgust the history of the Œcumenical Councils, and found nothing intelligent in them, except the decision of the seventh one, that there should be no more. Evidently all the theologians had become so entangled in their own disputes that they had grown desperate, and had at last realized that the more they talk the further they get from the truth."

"But if you despise dogmas, and believe only in the Gospel, then why need you give up Orthodoxy?"

"I am leaving Orthodoxy because, among the Catholic clergy, I have found a man who is a true believer, who guides me, and helps me to unravel my own doubts, and to see the true meaning of life."

"In other words, like so many Russian ladies, you have fallen into the hands of a clever Jesuit."

"In other words, like so many Russian

men, you have gathered your information about Jesuits in the novel 'The Eternal Jew.'"

"I have never read that novel. I only see very clearly that your dear Pater wants money for some convent, and therefore wants to shut you up in it."

"Not in the least. Père Etienne thinks that I shall be happier in a convent than in the world. He has no objection to an Orthodox convent. He only told me, a few days ago, that he always speaks of Catholic ones, because he knows nothing about Russian convent life."

"But why, then, do you not go into some Russian convent?"

"Because I know them too well. A Russian convent is a collection of vulgar, chattering, idle, lower-class women. The convent itself is a vulgar absurdity, since it is neither directed nor controlled by anybody. And, indeed, who is to control it? Not the officials of the Synod, I suppose?"

"Yes, but is not all that true also of Roman Catholic convents?"

"No. Every Catholic convent has not only its own head, but also higher control and direction. The discipline is quite different. Every Italian convent has one definite aim and object: to give its inmates the possibility of saving their souls in peace and silence, and everything is done for the attainment of this object."

"Well, even if we admit that this is true—by what right do you turn your back on all that life imposes on you, and think of nobody and nothing but the saving of your own soul?"

"By what right!" exclaimed Irene in amazement. "What a strange question!"

"Allow me. The Gospel, which you apparently respect, teaches us that we are all brothers, that we must help each other and live for each other. Whom will you help, whom will you save, if you hide yourself in a convent and think of nothing but your own soul?"

"Had I taken the veil when I was twenty, there might perhaps have been some reason in your reproaches. But I am now forty. I have lived through a long life, and have

convinced myself that I can be of no use to my fellows. My views on life are so personal to me that no one will ever understand me. I have always suffered through the vulgarity and roughness of other people, and as time passes I despise mankind more and more. In separating myself from human companionship, I may, little by little, forget what people are like, and so may perhaps learn to love them a little."

"Is it possible that among all your friends and acquaintances, you have never met one man who might be worthy of your attention or your love?"

Irene smiled bitterly.

"Russian men have not reached the period of development at which they could understand good women. They are still in the harem period, and they need only rough, vulgar, immoral females."

"I see you can make nice compliments. But if you have such a poor opinion of our higher circles, what about the masses? What about our honest, simple-minded, warm-hearted, noble-souled people? Is it possible

that they awaken no sympathy in you, that you have never felt the wish to help them, to educate them?"

"Don't speak to me of those pitiful cowards!" exclaimed Irene contemptuously. "They are incapable of anything better than losing the war, and disgracing Russia in the eyes of the whole world."

"I see you hold somewhat original views. Hundreds and thousands of soldiers have become hopeless cripples for the rest of their lives, in order to keep the enemy from our Russian soil, and in order to ensure for idle people like you the secure and safe enjoyment of their leisure and their capital. And in return you travel in strange lands, and insult our modest heroes. Allow me to congratulate you—such sentiments unquestionably do you honour."

Irene blushed, but maintained a scornful silence. Several minutes passed. The English party, with its guide and torches, drew near. Gzhatski rose, bowed dryly to Irene, and joined the tourists.

VII

They separated, both with the feeling of having said a great deal that was needless. On the whole, however, Irene was almost pleased that she had succeeded, for once in her life, in expressing to a Russian man the profound contempt that he and all his like awakened in her. As often happens in such cases, her indignation had poured itself out on the wrong person. Sergei Gzhatski had nothing whatever in common with Irene's despised and hated Petrograd career-hunters. His life indeed had arranged itself in its own fashion. He was born in Petrograd, but having, at the age of three, been taken to the far-off province of S——, he had remained there until his eighteenth year. His mother had suffered a paralytic stroke after the birth of her second child,

and had therefore been ordered to live in the country, which she did until her death. Deeply hurt by the fact that her husband had been unwilling to sacrifice to her illness his brilliant position in Petrograd, she had turned away from him, and lavished all her love upon her child. By her desire little Sergei had been educated at home, first by governesses and later by tutors. His mother wielded an immense influence over him. She was clever, intuitive, sensitive, and religious, and she brought up her son in a way that is more than rare in Petrograd families, where parents are too occupied with the distractions of the Metropolis to pay much attention to their children. Sergei adored his invalid mother, and her illness filled his heart with profound pity. He never indeed forgave his father for being so indifferent to her, and felt but little love or sympathy for the latter. On the death of his mother, Sergei was sent to college, where, thanks to an excellent grounding, he worked splendidly. He did not, however, like Petrograd, and having finished his course, he decided, in

spite of his father's advice and persuasion to the contrary, to return to the S—— estate, which his mother had left him. He loved country life, managed his estate well, and greatly increased the prosperity of his farms and crops. He occupied himself also with social activities, and was first chosen Marshal of the Nobility of the district, and then of the whole province. He was greatly loved and respected, being a man of the old school, honourable and conscientious, and as full of consideration for the interests of all the noble families in the neighbourhood as for his own well-being and prosperity.

His dream was a happy hearth and home and a large family, and yet he never married. Perhaps the reason of this might have been found in the pure and sacred image of his mother, with which he unconsciously compared all other women to their detriment; also a little in the fact that he was inclined to be proud and suspicious. He rarely went to Petrograd, and the provincial young ladies whom he met in S—— were far too frankly in ecstasies before his wealth and brilliant

position. Gzhatski was never happy abroad, and now deeply regretted that, after an attack of inflammation of the lungs caught during an autumn hunt, his doctors had persuaded him to pass the rest of the winter in Italy.

In spite of the mutual impertinences they had exchanged at their first meeting, Irene had not displeased Gzhatski, and, seeing her a few days later on the Corso, he approached her with a friendly greeting. Irene was so touched by this absence of rancour, that, wishing to destroy the unpleasant impression of their previous conversation, she invited him to come and see her. Two days later Gzhatski availed himself of her invitation, and, in the good old provincial Russian fashion, stayed three hours! He told Irene all about his estate and about the other S—— landowners, and expressed his horror at the indecent haste with which many of them, frightened by the recent "revolution," had sold their ancestral estates and moved to Petrograd.

"I say nothing," he remarked, "of the fact that their children will be penniless,

since they will very quickly lose their newly acquired money in all sorts of doubtful speculations; our landowners are proverbially credulous and unbusinesslike! But the principal trouble is that these ruined children will, in addition, have lost the ties which bound them to our soil—and it is my firm belief that one can only be a true patriot if one has lived from childhood on one's own land and among one's own people, and has stored in one's heart all the charming recollections and associations of an early youth spent in one's ancestral country home. Even now, when after a long absence I approach my little station, my heart beats, and I recognize with joy, almost with tenderness, the station officials, my coachman, my *troika*.* It is all near and dear to me; the woods, the fields, the peasants who greet me smilingly, and who have known and loved me all my life. How much that is sacred breathes in memories of childhood, and how sad life must be when they are absent! I think, for instance, that if you, Irene Pavlovna, had in your heart

* A sledge with three horses abreast.—Ed.

the remembrance of some modest little village church where you prayed as a child, you would never have dreamt of betraying the faith of your childhood; you would never even have formulated your vague, cosmopolitan belief in Christ, a belief that certainly cannot give you happiness."

From that day they became friends. Irene enjoyed the society of Gzhatski, who was always gay, interesting, and sincere. However dear Italy had grown to her, however deeply she respected Père Etienne, it was delightful to talk to a Russian, a man of her own race, her own social circle, and her own education and traditions. She never suspected that she, on her side, represented for Gzhatski a sort of anchor of salvation.

Poor Gzhatski had been unbearably lonely in Rome. Active, energetic, busy as he had always been, the enforced idleness of this new existence was insufferable to him. The Roman museums and monuments did not touch his heart. He had not enough imagination to people them with shadows of the past, as did Irene. He tried to study Rome with a

Baedeker's guide-book in his hand, but soon abandoned the task, and came to the conclusion that all the churches and ruins and galleries were exactly alike.

"When you have seen one, you have seen them all," he remarked frankly to his acquaintances.

Gzhatski had begun to take an interest in Italian fox-hunting, but happened the very first time he joined a hunt to be caught in a downpour of rain, and developed such a severe chill that his alarmed doctor forbade him any future expeditions of the kind, on pain of death from galloping consumption!

Every day the poor man wandered about sadly and aimlessly, finding fault with everything, hating everything, and abusing the strange Southern town that held him prisoner! Everything irritated him, even the climate, with its eternally warm, balmy breezes, even the dry Southern vegetation. Often, when sitting in the gardens of the Villa Borghese, he shut his eyes, and pictured to himself a Russian winter, the snow on the fields gleaming under the blue sky,

the red sun, the little waves of smoke rising from a cottage chimney, the crunch of footsteps on the frozen ground, the frosty, invigorating air . . . ! And then he opened his eyes, and looked resentfully at the broad Roman pines and the dusty grass and shrubs.

"What is this extraordinary time of the year?" grumbled Gzhatski capriciously. "It is not autumn, because there are no yellow leaves; it is not winter, because it is not cold; it is not summer, because it is not hot; and it is not spring, because there is nothing vivifying or rejuvenating in the air. No—this is a sort of fifth season, Roman, stupid, and senseless!"

He watched the passing crowd with animosity. They all seemed to him to be dressed in their Sunday best! There go two young Italian brunettes, in fashionable tight skirts, with wide fur scarves on their shoulders, showing, under their short dresses, dainty feet, shod as for a ball in elegant open shoes over open-work silk stockings. Here is a baby being taken for a walk, in a little white piqué summer coat, a hat to match,

and a huge collar of white goat-fur! And behind comes something quite wild—two little boys and a girl in sailor suits, without coats, and with bare legs and necks—yet the little girl carries an enormous muff, and the boys have sealskin caps!

"I suppose they have heard that people wear furs in the winter, but they don't know exactly how, so they have made guys of themselves!" muttered Gzhatski crossly.

His loneliness was even greater than his despair. He had already decided to risk his health and return to Russia, when his meeting with Irene turned his thoughts into another channel. He had no difficulty in assuring himself that she was the victim of Jesuit priests, that the poor girl was being wickedly deceived, and that it was his duty as a compatriot to come to her aid and save her. With all the accumulated energy of all those idle weeks, he threw himself into the struggle with Père Etienne, and in spite of Irene's wish to bring her two friends together, Gzhatski curtly refused to make the acquaintance of the "Catholic rogue." He

was very annoyed to see how obstinately Irene defended her friendship with the priest, and used all his eloquence to disillusion her on the subject of convent life.

"And what is the meaning of that insufferable manner, he cried irritably, "in which all priests make a prisoner of Christ, and announce to the world that He can only be found in their churches? They lie! I don't deny that in the early days of Christianity, monasteries and convents really represented Christian oases in a pagan desert. But that time has long since passed. Christ has long ago left the monasteries, and dwells among us, in our science, our literature, our law. We may quarrel as much as we please, we may accuse each other of treachery, but in spite of everything, we are all going along the path of Christian progress. Every time we liberate slaves in America or serfs in Russia, every time we abolish torture or corporal punishment, we are proclaiming liberty and brotherhood, we are serving Christ, and Christ is among us. Let them say, if they will, that the foundations of Christianity are shaking, that Christianity is at its last ebb, and must

make way for a new religion. It is absurd even to listen to these wild speeches. Christianity is eternal, if only because Christ did not invent anything strange or new or incomprehensible, but expressed clearly and simply truths which every human being feels dimly in his soul. It is not Christianity that will disappear, but its old and worn-out forms. Christianity is slowly and surely passing from the realms of legend and romance into real daily life, where it will take root more and more firmly, until it reigns supreme on earth. As to your convents, they are nothing but empty hives that the working-bees have long ago abandoned, while the monks are drones who have remained behind to linger lazily in the old place until they die. Is it possible that you, with your heart and your intelligence, can wish to end your life among these unnecessary, useless, sleeping drones?"

Irene listened in dismay. Both Gzhatski and Père Etienne spoke so eloquently and with such conviction. Which of them was in the right?"

"And what a wild idea!" exclaimed Gshatski furiously, "to become a nun! Do you really

think there are not enough nuns in Rome without you? Why, the whole town is teeming with convents that give one no peace with their everlasting bells. How many sick women and weak children are there in Rome, who need rest and sleep? And yet those imbeciles start their pandemonium at five o'clock every morning. You see, they have to save their precious souls. We in Russia, with our modest monks and nuns, can hardly grasp the extent of the impudence of these Southern religious orders, and the fury to which they can drive people. I perfectly understand why they were expelled from France, and I only profoundly regret that they have not yet been expelled from Italy. Just look what they have done with Rome. It is no longer a city, it is one huge cemetery. I can't listen to that eternal dull sound of bells. It always seems to me that they are burying me alive, and celebrating masses for the peace of my sinful soul. I always feel inclined to cry out: 'You lie! I am alive! And I am going to live a long time yet, and do many useful things.'"

In his enthusiasm, Gzhatski sometimes took recourse to means of which he himself would at another time have disapproved. Thus, on one occasion, he began, with a malicious smile and in some excitement, almost before he had shaken hands:

"You always go to the Via Gallio. But do you know by what nickname your Sœurs Mauves are known in Roman Society?"

"Nickname?" questioned Irene. "I did not know nuns could have nicknames."

"They are called 'Les Hetairas du bon Dieu,'" said Gzhatski, lowering his voice.

Irene was angry.

"Are you not ashamed of yourself?" she exclaimed indignantly. "You call yourself a gentleman, and you find it possible to insult these saintly women, who deserve the profoundest respect. I quite believe that the young people of the present day are capable of inventing this or any other obscenity. In their eyes, all women are low and worthless, and they cannot imagine or understand anything good or noble. But *you—you!* That you should repeat such things!"

"Well, well, I beg your pardon," said the confused and apologetic Gzhatski. "I did not mean to offend you. I only wanted to tell you how painful to me is the thought that you, my countrywoman, will also be known by this shameful title."

But the offended Irene would not listen to his apologies. Immediately after Gzhatski's departure (a somewhat hasty departure on this occasion), she went off to the convent. She hurried along, with the feeling one has when one rushes to friends who have just suffered some trouble or misfortune. Although Irene had never seen the face of a single one of the sisters, nor had spoken to any of them, she had gradually, through these daily hours of common prayer, come to regard them as her personal friends. She was therefore anxious, on this occasion, to prove by her presence her resentment of the insult offered to them by idle, vulgar gossips.

Evensong was almost at an end when Irene entered the church. There were very few people, the choir was singing an exultant hymn, the nuns were frozen into a sort of beatific ecstasy. Irene gazed at them long

and seriously, and suddenly realized that no insult could possibly reach them, that it was beyond the power of anyone to offend them. They were above all earthly troubles; nothing earthly had any value for them, all their hopes and dreams were concentrated in the next world. Thus, an emigrant, during his first days on board ship, thinks restlessly of the home he has left behind him, but when weeks have slipped away, his interest in the past grows fainter, and he thinks and dreams only of what he will find in the new land.

Père Etienne noticed Irene's restlessness, but although he was well aware of her friendship with Gzhatski, never mentioned the Russian's name. The clever, self-controlled priest neither opposed nor contradicted Gzhatski's views on Roman Catholicism, views which made themselves clearly felt in all Irene's words and arguments. He only more eloquently than ever advocated the convent. Under his influence, Irene saw before her a happy, peaceful old age, illuminated by constant sunshine, in the lap of luxurious Southern nature. And then came Gzhatski to destroy this dream; for, listening to his

words, as eloquent as any of Père Etienne's, she grew vaguely ashamed of having abandoned her home and her country, that dear Russia, of which Gzhatski spoke with such love and enthusiasm. He tried hard, indeed, to point out to Irene all the charm and goodness of the Russian people, and bitterly reproached her for having so light-mindedly hardened her heart and turned away from them.

"You have invented for yourself all sorts of fantastic heroes," he said. And you are unreasonably cross because you do not meet them in real life. Be reasonable, Irene Pavlovna! Human beings are simply animals. It is not so very long since they lived in caves and dressed in skins. They have not been lazy. They have worked zealously at themselves, and have attained much. It is not their fault if it needs another thousand centuries to perfect them, to entirely overthrow the animal, and to attain the spiritual ideal that God has placed before them. If you personally have already attained all this, that is your special good luck; but, pardon me, I doubt it exceedingly. Your life is not

at an end yet, and the savage beast may yet awaken in you quite unexpectedly. I, of course, perfectly understand your dislike of the Petrograd career-hunters. I do not greatly admire them myself. Nevertheless, I still assert that ambition, especially in Russia, is more a virtue than a vice. We Slavs are so listless and lazy, that without ambition we become, at the very best, Oblomoffs,* and at the worst, primitive beasts. You don't know the kind of types one meets in our far away provinces.

"You are very proud of the fact that you care nothing for wealth or rank. But do you know, Irene Pavlovna, that this is only another sign of a morbid, diseased nature? I always have the feeling that your ancestors must have lived too forcibly, too passionately —they have left you the legacy of an exhausted organism, and you no longer have the strength to love or care for anything. In your place, I should try to cultivate artificially some passion that would attach you more firmly to Mother Earth!"

* A famous character in a novel by Goncharoff, the type of a talented failure.

VIII

Père Etienne, feeling that the struggle with Gzhatski was getting beyond his strength, began to look round for help, and, as a first step, advised Irene to hear some of the sermons that are preached on certain days at most of the principal Roman churches. On the following Sunday, she made her way to San Luigi dei Francesi, a church famous for the eloquence of its preachers. The sermon was to be preached at four o'clock, before Vespers. The organ was playing softly as Irene entered the splendid edifice, with its magnificent marble pillars and bronze decoration. Italian preachers in Rome usually speak from a broad covered rostrum, lined with red cloth, in which frame the preacher, unable to restrain his excitement, strides backwards and forwards, and gesticulates

wildly, alternately throwing himself into a chair, and rising again. These broad rostrums are of very ancient origin; their prototype is still to be found among the ruins of the Forum, where they served, in bygone days of the Republic, as platforms from which the populace was addressed.

French preachers do not gesticulate. They mount a little winding stairway, to a round narrow pulpit, with an umbrella-like baldaquin, in which their little figures white-robed, and with black pelerines, look like Chinese dolls. While the Italian priest, in his passionate ardour, smites his chest and thunders at the congregation, his French brother pronounces a calm, well-thought out speech, whose aim is to astonish by its brilliant wit and its fine subtlety.

On this occasion, the sermon was on the subject of the cult of early Christian martyrs. It was, indeed, rather an historical lecture than a sermon. The preacher made a perfectly expressed and masterly exposition of various facts hitherto unknown to Irene, about the catacombs; the high honour in

which the tombs of the first Christian martyrs were held, and the respect shown even to false martyrs, *i.e.*, to deceased Christians, given out by their ambitious relatives as saints who had died for the Faith. These falsifications had, according to the preacher, assumed such enormous proportions, that it had been found necessary, in about the second century, to organize a special com mission with the purpose of looking into the matter.

"Et comme un faux gentilhomme est exclu de l'armorial," added the preacher, a little irrelevantly, "ainsi ces faux martyrs furent bannis du martyrologe."

Irene listened with interest, but wondered a little how this scientific, historical, slightly satirical lecture could touch or help the souls of the listeners. In half an hour it was over, and Irene rose to go, when suddenly the altar was brightly illuminated, the organ began to play, and from the gallery floated the dulcet tones of the beautiful angel-voiced choir. Irene had never heard such passionate romantic singing, except at

the opera. It awakened no religious inspiration in her ; on the contrary, closing her eyes in complete enjoyment, caressed by the softness of those delicious waves of sound, she saw before her her once-idolized singer Battestini, in the title rôle of Rubinstein's "Demon." The unhappy "exiled spirit" was wandering in the desert, solitary, forsaken, heartbroken, hopelessly in love!

"All the sorrow, all the suffering of life," he sobbed passionately from the gallery, "is caused by solitude. Live together in couples! Love, caress, and comfort one another! And above all things, lose no time! Enjoy the delights of love, while you can!"

The sound of dull, stifled sobbing fell on Irene's ear. It emanated from a grey-haired old man beside her, who had fallen on his knees and buried his face in his hands.

"He weeps because it is too late for him to love," concluded Irene, as she glanced pityingly at the bent figure of the old man.

The service ended; the great doors opened, and the warm, golden, Roman evening rushed into the church. Irene turned

her steps homewards, enjoying the blue sky, and the gay good-natured Sunday crowd that filled the streets. Somewhere in the distance a military band was playing, the air was full of laughter and merriment. Pretty children, in their best frocks, and with little bare legs, were frolicking about to the evident delight of their parents, who watched them with tender caressing smiles.

"How glorious, how beautiful life is!" thought Irene, still under the impression of the singing. But having traversed two streets and turned into the Piazza Venezia, she suddenly stopped short, horror-struck.

"But they did not sing about earthly love *at all!*" she exclaimed to herself in complete confusion. "How could such thoughts ever be awakened by their prayers? How did it happen? How came I to fall into such an error?"

Irene was both amazed and ashamed, and decided to say nothing to Père Etienne about her impressions of the service. This, however, was not as easy as it seemed. The wily priest cross-examined her severely, and

of course, Irene ended by admitting everything. Père Etienne frowned. He knew all about this tragic "Demon," singing so passionately in the desert—he had met him twice in the corridor, on the way to Irene's room!

"You are far too impressionable," he observed severely, "and music evidently irritates your nerves. You will do better to attend the lectures of Monsignor Berra, in the convent of the Ursulines.

Irene agreed, and, on the appointed day, knocked at the small door of the convent in the Via Flavia. The sister who answered her knock glanced at the pass ticket in Irene's hand, and led her through a quadrangle with slim Gothic columns. Irene was astonished at the silence. Only a few steps away was the crowded, noisy street — yet here reigned the stillness of the grave. She raised the leather curtain with which the doors of churches in Rome are always covered during the winter, and found herself in a cold, damp, but very elegant chapel, filled with ladies, young girls, and children.

Men were not admitted here — only two abbots were modestly hiding themselves in a corner.

The nuns, true to their traditions, did not show themselves at all, but from somewhere on high came the sound of the organ, while the fresh young voices of the convent school children sang the prayers.

"Well," thought Irene with a smile, "at least this singing will not lead me into temptation!"

After a short service, Monsignor Berra, a handsome, clever old man, entered the pulpit. Expressing himself in that most elegant French that was once spoken at the French Court, but that is now forgotten by all except, perhaps, the clergy, he began a lecture on Esther.

Irene listened with pleasure to the subtle, clever, witty phrases of the priest, punctuated by long quotations from Racine, whose name, however, Berra did not mention, speaking of him only as "the most Christian of all poets." But as the lecture continued, it seemed to grow strangely familiar to Irene, and sud-

denly she remembered what association it awakened in her mind. A few days previously, Lady Muriel had taken her to the Palazzo of the N—— Embassy, to see its famous, beautiful tapestries. One of the rooms was lined entirely with scenes from the story of Esther, embroidered after seventeenth-century designs. The figures, indeed, represented neither Persians nor Jews, but simply French Marquises and Viscounts, who had temporarily doffed their powdered wigs, and had amused themselves by dressing up in Persian disguises.

"When I look at Esther," the witty daughter of the Ambassador had remarked to Irene, pointing to the tapestry, "I always wonder how long she practised and rehearsed fainting, before carrying it out so gracefully!"

Listening to Berra, Irene had quite this same impression of an "imitation" Esther! Described by him, the primitive, passionate Jewess became an affected lady of the Court of Louis XV., one of those numerous favourites who knew well how to use their coquetry in order to manage, to their perfect

satisfaction, their own little affairs and those of all their relatives and friends!

Towards the end of the lecture, the preacher abandoned his tone of levity, and grew serious. In connection with Esther's fervent prayer, he remarked that if our prayers remain unanswered to-day, it is only because they are so cold and proud.

"Imagine, Mesdames," he said, "a beggar who would approach you in the street, asking for alms, in a cold, proud voice, as though he were demanding his due! Would you not be justly incensed? Would you not turn away and rather bestow your bounty upon one who asks it humbly and in tears? Pray then also to God like humble supplicants, trusting in His mercy and goodness."

Irene returned home, much impressed by these words. "Yes," she thought—she was undoubtedly to be counted among the proud beggars! She knew her own virtues, and she considered she had a right to demand a reward from God. How would it be if she were to change the nature of her prayers? And, under the impulse of a new hope, she

fell on her knees, weeping, sobbing, praying: "Lord! I am but a humble supplicant! I resign all my rights and privileges! I ask only for mercy! Send me happiness—and if that is impossible, then give me at least rest, that spiritual rest for which my soul hungers!"

Irene prayed passionately, and with bitter tears—but all the time, reason was whispering in answer: "What are you asking? you know that you are praying for the impossible. Happiness for you can take only one form, that of love, love, love, that love of which you have been dreaming all your life! But think a little—how is that possible at your age? Love is nature's method of continuing our race. That is why young girls are gifted with such attractions for young men. At your age, to have children is impossible—that is why beauty has been taken from you, and men pass you by with indifference. You ask for spiritual rest, but that is only attainable by people who have fulfilled the duties imposed on them by nature. You were born to be a wife and a mother—Where is your husband? Where are you

children? Where is your family? God created the world on a foundation of logical laws, and, however passionately you may pray, He cannot change these laws."

Irene arose in despair. Oh! that accursed helpless logic, that kills all prayer and destroys all hope!

Time passed, and Irene's nervousness increased day by day. Sermons, church services, her disputes with Gzhatski, all this alike irritated and enervated her. Père Etienne observed the poor woman with real pity, but could devise no means of comforting or helping her. Happening on one occasion to mention a famous convent at Assisi, which he thought Irene might some day do well to visit with the object of retreat and prayer, she caught at the idea. On the following day, strictly forbidding the porter at the *pension* to disclose her new address to *anyone*, and without saying good-bye to Gzhatski, she left Rome.

IX

On her arrival at Assisi, Irene immediately felt a little calmer than she had done in Rome. She had often noticed that when staying in mountainous districts her nerves grew quieter, and she felt, for the time being, less depressed. She loved the scent of the fresh mountain air, and it seemed to her, under its influence, as though, after all, life might still have in store for her many happy hours. An old doctor who had once treated her in Paris had called her in fun "la femme des montagnes"—perhaps, indeed, she should have lived always at high altitudes.

Assisi, in addition, was a delightful place. From the hills among which the little town with its famous monastery nestled, there was a glorious view over an immense plain, dotted with houses, churches, gardens, and villages.

In the distance rose the peaks of the Apennines.

The impression of this view was rendered all the more enchanting by that wonderful colouring, so well known to all who have visited Umbria or Tuscany in the spring. The mountains were nearly always wreathed in an azure mist; the shadows were deep blue, little white cloudlets floated in the turquoise sky; the valley was green under its carpet of velvet grass, powdered already with daisies; the fruit-trees in the orchards were covered with a wealth of pink and white blossom. Such landscapes can be seen only in the pictures of the Italian old masters, for they alone, of all painters, have possessed the gift of reproducing all the softness and harmony of their native colouring.

Assisi has, to this day, preserved its character of a mediæval Borgo, and has probably changed but little since the days of St. Francis. An old ruined fortress crowns the higher of a group of hills, and from this point run in all directions narrow, ill-paved little streets, illuminated at night, as in old times, by feeble

lanterns hanging on wires stretched across the roadway. Nobody seems to live in the monotonous, grey stone houses with eternally closed shutters; nobody ever seems to walk in the deserted streets and dark alleys. Only an occasional donkey tied to a wall stands meditatively in the middle of the road, and from time to time moves his long ears as a sign of life. Now and then there float across the air from some cellar the beat of a carpenter's hammer, and the subdued tones of his voice, singing about the "faithless Fiametta." Life seems to have stopped at the twelfth century, since when everything has lain still in an enchanted sleep. Even the numerous tourists do not succeed in awakening the slumbering town. The inhabitants are mostly monks and nuns, with a scattering of Polish Catholics, and English old maids, who come to kneel at the shrine of St. Francis.

Irene set herself zealously to visit all the holy places. First, she descended into the valley, to the Church of Santa Maria dei Angeli. It had once stood in the heart of

a dreaming forest, where, in the fourth century, some monks had built a tiny chapel, round which, partly in cells, partly in caves, the brotherhood had settled. In this primitive little settlement, St. Francis lived and prayed and died. Later on his remains were removed and buried in the new and magnificent fortress-like Franciscan Monastery, whose white walls and towers now shine dazzlingly in the sun. The old forest has long since disappeared, and the touching little chapel is almost lost in the centre of the magnificent temple built around it. Monks show visitors round the monastery, pointing out the cell in which St. Francis died, the grotto in which he slept, and the little garden where grew the roses without thorns, that God had sent him as a special grace.

Irene went also to do homage to the body of St. Clara, who, influenced by the teaching of St. Francis, left the world, her family and friends, retired into a convent, and founded the Order of the Clarissians. St. Clara, too, passed her life in the modest little convent of St. Damian, and it was only after her death

that her body was transferred to the gorgeous Church of the New Convent, where, in a niche, enclosed in a glass coffin, it rests in nun's attire, and with a capuchin drawn over the blackened features.

Most of all, however, Irene enjoyed her excursion to Carceri, the distant hermitage in a mountain cave, where St. Francis had often prayed and fasted. She ordered a carriage a day in advance, and, at the appointed hour, Giuseppe, a handsome young Umbrian, drove up to the door of the hotel, raised his hat, and smiled caressingly to the waiting Irene. They traversed the entire town at a walking pace, on account of the steep, narrow streets, and this slow drive was a sort of triumphal progress for young Giuseppe. He seemed to be on a friendly footing with the whole place; every man they met on their way turned and walked for a while beside the carriage, his hand on the shaft, and conversing animatedly with Giuseppe. They all emphatically persuaded him to come, at some particular time and for some particular reason, to the Piazza

Nuova, and he repeatedly swore by all the saints to keep the appointment.

At last they passed through the old fortress gates, and Giuseppe drove up to a small house, from the window of which peeped a pretty, sunburnt, smiling little face. Giuseppe jumped from his box, and leaving Irene at the mercy of the scorching Italian sun, disappeared into the house. Time passed; the young horse, peacefully regaling itself on fresh grass, was certainly in no hurry to proceed, and Giuseppe stayed away so long that Irene grew seriously angry. At last he appeared wreathed in smiles, and announced that the bullocks would be brought round in a moment.

"The bullocks!" exclaimed Irene; "but why do we want bullocks?"

"How should we do without them?" he retorted. "We are going into the mountains. A horse cannot make that journey alone. We must have two bullocks."

Irene waited with some curiosity. In about ten minutes a middle-aged woman, probably the mother of the pretty sunburnt

girl, appeared, leading by a rope two enormous, splendid, grey bullocks, with immense horns. They were evidently perfectly tame, and the woman, placing them in front of the horse, tied them to the carriage. Giuseppe helped solely with advice, exchanging playful glances the while with the pretty daughter, who was hopping about near him on one foot, the other foot, evidently wounded, being tied up with a white rag.

After much delay the procession started. The road was indeed appalling! A narrow, steep, stony mountain path, over which no man in his senses would ever dream of driving a carriage. But what will not an Italian do when there is a chance of earning a few *lire?*

In front, leading the bullocks, walked the woman with a shawl pushed well down over her forehead. She looked sufficiently modest and respectful, and was also sufficiently careless and untidy, to remind one of a Russian peasant woman. The thin useless little ropes she had brought broke every minute, the ends falling and getting entangled in the animals' feet. Giuseppe was furious,

constantly jumped off the box, and bitterly reproached the poor woman.

At last the bullocks were unharnessed, the relieved horse trotted gaily along a wider and much smoother road, and Irene thought that her troubles were over. Alas, however! At a turn of the way appeared a peasant waiting with two other bullocks (white ones this time), and the same story began all over again. The road grew always worse and more dangerous, and Irene hardly knew whether to be more frightened or delighted with the wonderful view that greeted her gaze. Assisi, with its stone walls and towers, lay spread out before her like a fairy-fortress, with a background of blue hills, and surrounded by a frame of grey-green olive-trees and dark cypresses. In the foreground, like carpets flung down at random, gleamed brilliant patches of emerald grass—the whole picture, indeed, was so fresh, so lovely, so poetical, that it might have been torn from a masterpiece by Botticelli.

At last the bullocks turned into a cavern-like opening among the rocks, from which

issued a whiff of cold air. They had reached the entrance to the monastery, and Irene alighted and followed the path between two stone walls. A deathlike silence surrounded her. The sun caressed the as yet leafless old trees, birds sang, the path grew always narrower, and at last the old gates barred the way. Irene rang the bell. A decrepit old doorkeeper, walking with difficulty, led her into a tiny courtyard with a stone well in its centre, and passed her on to a young Franciscan, just on the point of acting as guide to an Englishwoman who had come from Assisi on foot.

The tiny retreat was arranged partly in natural grottos and partly in little cave-cells, hewn out of the rocks. The little staircases and doors were so narrow and low that one could nowhere stand upright. Here, in the twelfth century, lived, at times, St. Francis, and la sua compagnia; then, later on, St. Bernard of Siena, and many other saints. The poetic stillness of the place, and its sacred associations, had attracted them, and they had jealously guarded the few small

relics of St. Francis that had been left there —a tiny narrow pillow, a little box for the Holy Sacrament, and a cross.

The young Franciscan explained to the two visitors the arrangement and disposition of the settlement. He showed them the sort of things that are always shown in all monasteries ; an old, faded sacred image, that was superstitiously supposed to have on one occasion spoken to some nun, and a miraculous crucifix, carved from some specially sacred wood. Lowering his voice, the monk added that an influential cardinal had once taken this crucifix away to his splendid chapel in Rome, but that during the very first night after its arrival there it had disappeared, and returned miraculously to its old place. He showed them also the precipice into which St. Francis had flung the devil who had come to tempt him (the latter had been smashed to pieces on the stones below, and had never again returned to the settlement), and the mountain-stream, whose noisy rush had disturbed the saint's meditations, and whose voice he had silenced for ever.

Irene was specially touched by the little platform in the heart of the forest, from which, according to tradition, St. Francis had preached sermons to the birds. How beautiful, how poetic was this legend! Having withdrawn himself from human companionship, far away from men who in their pride imagine themselves to be superior beings, specially created, made of special clay, St. Francis had humbled himself before God's greatness, and had understood that birds were his dear, innocent brothers. He longed to share with them the rapture that filled his soul, and the birds, understanding this rapture, joyfully sang and twittered in answer. Man was not made for solitude—and the hermit, having isolated himself in the desert, found the way to salvation in the friendship of tame birds and beasts. . . .

Having once seen all the sights of Assisi, Irene seldom ventured out of doors. She spent most of her time on the little terrace of the hotel, admiring the view that was spread out before her, and growing, day by day, more attached to it. What a wealth,

indeed, of variety and beauty was to be found there! At seven o'clock each morning she opened her window and let in the fresh, fragrant air. The whole valley then seemed to be asleep, wrapped in a dewy mist. At midday, however, all was smiling and basking in floods of brilliant sunlight, and towards five in the afternoon the sun, like a great ball of fire, disappeared in the West, the sky grew pale, and light-blue shadows gradually began to draw their veils across the plain. Even lovelier still was the night, when bright stars trembled like diamonds in the dark sky, and the young moon shone as far away, as coldly, and as indifferently as she shines in the North and in the mountains. The whole great valley was dotted with little lights; the neighbouring town of Perugia made a sudden splash of brightness, and the white roads wound about mysteriously among the dark fields. The silence was indescribable; not a sound was to be heard, except, from time to time, the distant barking of a dog, or the throb of a far-off, passing train.

Irene began to feel the vague weariness of

spring-time. She had experienced so much of late, and had received so many new impressions, that her mind needed rest. She did not want to think about anything. Her thoughts moved lazily; she was placidly happy on the little terrace, with its palms and its flowers; she had no wish to go anywhere, she wanted only to repose in her comfortable wicker sofa-chair, and delight in nature.

She often thought of Gzhatski, but always unwillingly, even with displeasure.

"Why did I ever meet that man?" she thought resentfully. "Until he came, everything went well!" But for him, she would already have taken the veil, and would probably have found happiness. Why had she ever paid attention to the words of a mere passer-by, who had occupied himself with her affairs simply because he had nothing else to do? Very soon he would return to his Russia, where he had so many interests and so many friends, and would never even remember Irene. Perhaps it would be better to stay at Assisi until after he had left Rome.

Having arrived at this decision, Irene wrote to Père Etienne, telling him that the mountain air was agreeing with her splendidly, and that she would not return to Rome till Easter. She posted her letter, and feeling pleased and relieved, went for a stroll in the balmy evening air. What was her astonishment and annoyance when, on her return, she found Gzhatski in the entrance-hall of the hotel, eagerly questioning the proprietor about something. Her face expressed such frank displeasure, that Gzhatski felt provoked.

"What an unexpected meeting!" he said as naturally as possible, pretending, somewhat unsuccessfully, to be much astonished. "I was told you had taken the veil in one of the Roman convents."

"Not yet," smiled Irene, "but it is as a preparation for that event that I am recuperating here in the mountain air."

"Yes, the air is lovely," agreed Gzhatski, hurriedly. "And the views are beautiful. I hardly expected to find all this in the Apennines."

Irene took it upon herself to show Gzhatski

all the sights of Assisi. Sergei Grigorievitch praised everything, was delighted with all he saw, was respectful to the monks who acted as guides in the churches and monasteries, and bought a whole collection of various Catholic souvenirs.

"Can you guess what I have found to amuse me in Rome?" he asked Irene one day at dinner. "I go to the churches and listen to the Catechism lessons. I assure you it is most interesting. On one side of the church sits a nun, surrounded by little girls, and on the other, a monk, with a class of little boys, to whom he addresses questions, in turn. If you could only see what lovely little faces they have! These same Italians, that are so horrid when they grow up, are, at the age of eight or ten, exactly like Raphael's cherubs. Of course, they don't understand anything yet about the Catechism. What is the use of a catechism when the little legs of the pupils run all by themselves, so that there is no stopping them? The greater part of the lesson consists, for the 'Pater,' in persuading his listeners to sit still, not to swing on their

chairs, not to jump up, not to run about the church, and not to fight.

"It is amusing, too, to listen to their conversations with their teacher. I remember once, for instance, he asked one such little Cupid the number of the Sacraments, or something like that. The answer had to be *five*. The young rascal thought for a moment, then smiled roguishly, spread out all the five fingers of his right hand, and, silently, with a triumphant air, held them to the Pater's nose. Do you imagine the priest was offended at this lack of respect? Not in the least! He is an Italian himself, and teaches his Catechism more by means of gestures than words. Oh! what amusing people! When I look at those children, I feel a great heartache because I have not a little sonlet like that of my own!"

"But why do you not get married, if you so much want to have children?"

"Get married? That is not so easy. I will tell you a conversation I once had on the subject with my small nephew Seryozha. He is my godson, and will probably be my heir.

We are enormous friends. When I go to stay in the country with his mother, my cousin, Seryozha never leaves me for a moment, and if only you could hear our conversations! He has the straightforward, logical, fearless intelligence of most small boys of his age. And so, on one occasion, he announced to me that as soon as ever he grows up, he will get married, just because he wants to have little children, whom he likes. 'There is only one trouble,' he added, very seriously, 'I shall have to live all the time with my wife; there is no escape.' He said it so well, that I gave him a hearty kiss. You see, although I am forty, and Seryozha is only eight, he explained to me quite clearly why I do not marry."

"The poor wife!" laughed Irene.

On the following day, Gzhatski left Assisi. Just as he was getting into the cab to go to the station, he suddenly turned to Irene, who was there to say good-bye, and exclaimed:

"By the way, I had quite forgotten. I brought you a present from Rome. Please accept it," and he took a book from his pocket, and handed it to her.

"What is it?" stammered Irene vaguely.

"It is a Life of St. Amulfia. Like you, she found that her vocation was to enter a convent. I thought that, as a future nun, it might be interesting and useful to you to know something of her convent life.'

Irene accepted this gift somewhat mistrustfully. It seemed suspicious, especially as Gzhatski obstinately avoided meeting her glance, while an ill-concealed smile trembled on his lips.

Irene went back to her favourite terrace, and for a long time watched the cab going down the hill, raising a cloud of dust. A suspicion arose in her heart, that Gzhatski had come to Assisi exclusively with the purpose of giving her this book, and she began to read it with great interest.

X

Saint Amulfia lived in the seventeenth century. Her parents were French *petits bourgeois*, uneducated, poor, almost peasants. From her earliest childhood, she was greatly attracted by convent life, and always nursed the dream of one day becoming a nun. Her relations tried to dissuade her from this project, and wished her to marry. Amulfia, however, found all men repulsive, and the very thought of marriage filled her with horror and disgust. For a long time, lacking the dower without which no one is accepted in Catholic convents, she was unable to join the order she had chosen. At last, however, after the death of her parents, their small capital being divided among the children, she took her portion to the convent, and was received as a novice.

From the very first days of her entry, she astonished all the nuns by her humility, and the fervency of her prayers. At night, in her cell, she chastised herself with ropes, ran needles into her fingers, and covered herself with wounds. As always happens when the organism is weakened by torture and privation and a constant state of nervous exaltation, she began to see visions. Christ appeared to her, and she spoke with Him, as with her heavenly bridegroom, who claimed her as exclusively His own, and forbade her to continue even her friendly relations with a good and kind young nun for whom she had felt a special sympathy on entering the convent. "Si elle ne se retirait pas des créatures," threatened the Heavenly Bridegroom, "Il saurait se retirer d'elle," and the saint obeyed, and turned away from her friend.

These visions were known to the whole convent, but did not astonish anybody. The other nuns also held converse with God, and sometimes on the most trifling subjects. For instance, there was one who greatly disliked cheese which, for this very reason, her

superior had once ordered her to eat, as a penance. So she went to church, threw herself on her knees before the Crucifix, and prayed for five hours, with tears and sobs, for strength to eat her little piece of cheese. At last, she heard a voice, ordering her to arise, and make yet one more effort. She obeyed, and the miracle was accomplished: although with shudders of disgust, she yet succeeded in swallowing the cheese.

Not only God, however, but also Satan played a great part in the lives of the nuns. On one occasion, for instance, an absent-minded novice fell down the stairs, but managed not to hurt herself. She told of her experience in the following words: "Satan pushed me at the top, but a guardian angel was waiting at the bottom, and caught me in his arms."

There was only one nun in the convent who saw no visions. This was Sister Jeanne, the matron of the hospital, a busy, active, energetic woman, devoted to the sick who were brought to the hospital from the village. Saint Amulfia's biographer spoke of this

sister with great severity. "She so completely exhausted her charity in favour of the sick whom she tended," he said, "that she had none left for the sisters who were her subordinates in this work."

Having received Saint Amulfia as assistant nurse, Sister Jeanne constantly scolded her for her clumsy carelessness. Saint Amulfia, indeed, had spent so great a part of her time in conversation either with God or with Satan, and had grown so absent-minded, that she was completely incapable of giving a patient a spoonful of medicine, or a cup of beef-tea, without spilling them all over the bed!

At last, from a novice, Saint Amulfia became a full-blown nun, and from this time onward called Christ her "Celestial Husband." The visions continued, and the conversations became so grotesque that Irene, on reading them, sometimes quite involuntarily burst into peals of laughter. She always, however, immediately and reproachfully stopped herself, thinking in horror: "How dare I? What am I doing? She was a *Saint!*"

With every page, however, Irene's perplexity grew. What if there were similar saints among the Sœurs Mauve? What if (God forbid!) she herself should become a saint? Irene tried to console herself with the thought that all this had taken place in the seventeenth century, in days of ignorance and mental darkness—on the other hand, however, she remembered that that had been the century of Corneille, Molière, Racine, the brilliant Madame de Sévigné, the golden age, indeed, of French literature. Beyond this, the entire arrangement of life in a Catholic Convent was new to her, and surprised her exceedingly. She had imagined a refuge for women who had been disappointed in life, and who longed for a quiet harbour where they would be sheltered from the storms of the world, and where, safely anchored at last, they could end their days in holiness and prayer. She had imagined the relations of the nuns to each other, as polite and friendly, much like those of well-bred people staying in the same hotel, and meeting each other every day at dinner. In reality

there appeared to be a severe régime, by which she, Irene, would be obliged to submit in every way to the will of her Superior, who might be a trivial-minded, common person, capable of forcing her subordinates to spend their time in performing such "sacrifices" or "great deeds" as eating something they did not like, or occupying themselves with something useless that could not interest them.

Irene shuddered at her own carelessness. Having made no enquiries whatever, she had painted for herself an imaginary romantic picture, and had been on the point of sacrificing in its favour the personal liberty she had always enjoyed. What, if on closer acquaintance, the happiness of that unknown, much-dreamt-of convent life proved to be an illusion? What if she should afterwards wish to escape from it, and it were too late, no return being possible? There came back to Irene's recollection long-forgotten stories of unloved wives or unwanted daughters, who had been hidden away in Catholic convents, and whom no one had afterwards succeeded in saving or even

tracing. For that matter, thought Irene, there was not even, in her case, anyone who would trouble about trying to trace her—so terribly alone was she in the world! For the first time in her life, she shuddered with sheer fright, and, together with this sudden fear, the thought of Gzhatski as her protector flashed through her mind.

"Yes, *there* is a man who will not let any harm come to me!" she thought. "He is of the kind that would find and save his friends, if they were at the end of the earth, or at the bottom of the sea!"

Irene threw down the book that had so disturbed her peace of mind, but her restlessness, nevertheless, grew. Assisi lost its charm for her, and a sudden spell of bad weather offering itself as an excuse, she hurried her departure, and returned to Rome.

XI

As soon as she arrived in Rome, Irene sent for Gzhatski.

"Are you not ashamed of yourself?" she asked him reproachfully, "for having given me such a horrible book? What was your object? Of what benefit could such a book be to anybody?"

"I only wanted to open your eyes to convent life," he answered, "you seemed to know nothing but its outer, or decorative side, so I thought I would show you what is hidden under that charming exterior."

"But Saint Amulfia lived in the seventeenth century! Surely everything has changed since then?" protested Irene weakly.

"Not in convents!" replied Gzhatski with emphasis. "Nothing can ever change where the very fundamental conditions are abnor-

mal. Human beings were created to live in the world, to work together, to be happy together, and thankfully to accept and enjoy all that life can give. Only in complying with these conditions can they retain their moral and mental equilibrium. The moment they leave the world and become possessed by some monomania, such as the saving of their own souls, they are unbalanced, and there soon follow all the hallucinations, visions, temptations of the devil, and what not, so common in convents. Convents are now being closed in France, not, as is popularly supposed, through the influence of Freemasons, but by science and enlightenment, two forces that always hold high their torch in France, and always have the last word. No one doubts that in their time convents were of great use to humanity. With the exception of the comparatively rare cases in which inexperienced souls were forcibly or artificially lured into taking the veil and so ruining their healthy, normal natures, most of the people who became nuns were such as felt the renunciation of normal life to be

their vocation, in other words, entirely unbalanced characters. Convents, therefore, rendered an enormous service to society by imprisoning within their walls erotic and hysterical women, and all sorts of maniacs, whose presence in the world might have been highly detrimental to their fellows. Whenever some sort of power fell accidentally into their hands, they managed to do harm even after having renounced life. One need only take the one great instance of the Spanish Inquisition, and of all the subtle refinement of torture in which, during its sway, the cruel voluptuousness of these diseased natures found its outlet.

"Science tells us that rest and silence and a regular life, free from all disquieting influences, work wonders for sufferers from nervous diseases. In monasteries and convents, such patients were not only kept, but they also underwent cures, for in addition to everything else, these religious institutions were generally situated amid the loveliest and healthiest natural surroundings, and almost all the modern German and Swiss sanatoria and

'Rest or Air Cure' Establishments have been built on or near the ruins of some ancient monastery or convent. The founders of the latter well knew with what kind of subjects they would have to deal, and what exactly these subjects needed. I repeat: Monasteries and convents have in the past rendered humanity a great service, by taking the place of asylums and sanatoria for mental and nervous sufferers. Now that institutions for the cure or care of such sufferers abound everywhere, convents have become useless, and are being suppressed.

"In Russia, they still exist, and will long continue to exist and be needed, because they provide for our peasantry that change and relaxation which the upper classes find in their travels abroad. A certain amount of change is essential to all human beings, but most particularly to inhabitants of the gloomy North, with its cold cheerless climate. The English, for instance, have long ago realized that it is necessary for the maintenance of their health and strength to travel at least once a year. Whither would our Rus-

sian peasant and his hapless 'old woman' betake themselves, if there existed no monastery where one can go for a 'prayer week? For them, convents represent the new places, new people, new impressions, which are so necessary for jaded nerves, and which have such a reviving influence on body and soul. Our monasteries are perfectly aware of this, and willingly receive, feed, and maintain pilgrim visitors. The most hospitable of all is, perhaps, the Valamski Monastery, and our silly Petrograd does not even suspect how much of its moral and mental good health it owes to this institution. While various charitable societies are only just beginning to organize picnics and excursions, the Valamski Brothers have long had their own private steamers, which, modestly and without any advertisement or flourish of trumpets, bring visitors to Valam, at a fare cheap enough to be within the means of the most limited purse. Once there, all travellers are received alike by the monks, with kindness and courtesy, are regaled with simple, wholesome food, and provided with distrac-

tions in the shape of rowing and sailing. How many delightful impressions have been brought back from these excursions by the poor of Petrograd, during those glorious summer months, when all nature rejoices! But for the Valamski Monastery, many a puny Petrograd slum child would never have known how beautiful God's world is. All honour to the modest brotherhood of Valam! These are true Christians, since they share with others God's most glorious gift to man —nature!

"Russian monasteries also render a service to the people by their beautiful singing. The desire for music is not, as many people wrongly suppose, the privilege of the cultured circles. There are indeed many clever and well-educated people who do not care about music at all, while there are ignorant peasants who delight in it. You have only to go to the big Cathedral of the Alexander-Nevsky Lavra, at Christmas or Easter. At no concert will you see such beaming, happy faces. The people will stand for two or three hours, forgetting everything in the

world but the delight of the soft dulcet tones of the choir.

"In all poor countries, where general culture is not very advanced, monasteries give to the masses the silence, poetry and music, for which their souls unconsciously yearn. As soon, however, as a people grows prosperous, educates itself and finds its own distractions, the need for convents or monasteries disappears. Simple-minded folk imagine that the suppression of the religious orders means the decay of Christianity—but they forget that monasteries existed in India and in China, long before the birth of Christ. Christianity did not invent them, but the monasteries of the time gradually adopted the new faith. Actually, all such institutions are quite contrary to Christian ideals, for Christ's teaching, above all else, enjoins activity. Much more in conformity with the Gospel are the modern religious working associations, with their hospitals, schools, and refuges, which are springing up everywhere now in place of the old convents. Their introduction into modern life is perfectly comprehensible. In addition

to the nervous wrecks, there were also some healthy people who used to enter convents; people, indeed, whose superior spiritual health, so to speak, prompted them to consider the happiness of others, before their own. Such monks and nuns as these were not content to do nothing but fast and pray, but invented occupations for themselves. Some founded schools and colleges, others nursed the sick, others again became missionaries in foreign lands. They wore the prescribed attire of their orders, but in all other respects they lived in the world as before, loving and helping their neighbours, and sharing the interests and joys and sorrows of their fellow-creatures. It is this healthy class of monastics, that is now, after the suppression of the old institutions, hastening to found new ones, more in keeping with the needs of our times. Such charitable associations have sprung up in large numbers also in Russia—God speed them! But institutions of that kind will never attract people like you, Irene Pavlovna!"

"Why not?"

"Because you are *ill*, and your illness makes the old convents, with their mysticism and their mysteries and their sleeping existence somewhere between earth and heaven, far more attractive to you."

"But what is this disease?" asked Irene, with a mistrustful smile.

"The disease from which you are suffering is disgust for all activity and contempt for all mankind. This disease usually attacks the children or grandchildren of writers, scientists, artists, sometimes also of State officials, the kind that have spent all their lives in pouring over State archives or other papers. Their mental overwork, at the expense of physical strength, leaves indelible traces, and has to be paid for by their children, who always have morbid desires for some fantastic existence invented by their own imaginations, and find real life dull and colourless. As soon as they are over the borders of childhood, they begin, like ancient Israel, to dispute and struggle with God. They refuse to accept the humanity He has created, with all its faults and failings; they invent their own fan-

ciful heroes, and demand of God that He should give these imaginary creatures life. It is principally women in whom this morbid contempt for human nature manifests itself. The girl, indeed, is rare who does not, on getting married, attempt to remodel her husband according to her own ideas. She tries to turn a passionate wording into a monk, prepares to metamorphose a pensive lover of solitude into a brilliant society dandy, or forces a pleasure-loving social lion into the narrow circle of her domestic interests. And the poor deluded creature never for a moment doubts the success of her efforts. 'I shall only have to be insistent, and to give him no peace,' she thinks, 'and all will be as I wish.'

"Some women, indeed, shatter their happiness in this way, and to the end of their lives never realize their mistake. Of coure, this ridiculous feature of their characters proves the profound depths of ignorance in which women are still groping, in spite of their superficial, if sometimes apparently brilliant, intellectual attainments. Were their mental development less shallow, they would under-

stand that God cannot for their pleasure entirely remodel a completed creation. This seems, indeed, a very simple fact, but it is surprising how few women can grasp it. Most of my morbid types try to escape from the prose of life by means of operas, novels, dreams, and in this way they only broaden the gulf that separates them from their more reasonable fellow-creatures. They feel that happiness is their birthright, and they torment themselves because they cannot attain it. Time passes, and brings disillusionment, since the world refuses to conform itself to vain fancies. And then begins the quarrel with God.

"'Send me a man after my own heart,' cry the poor deluded ones to the Almighty, often with bitter tears. 'Then I shall be happy, will believe in Thy might, and will bless and praise Thy name. I despise the low, sinful people by whom I am surrounded, and I suffer through this very fact. I long to bow my head before some nobler being, some man who has only virtues, and to whom I could all my life look up in adoration.'

"What answer can God give to such prayers, however sincere and agonized they may be? They remain ungranted, and little by little they turn into murmurs, discontent, and finally, unbelief.

"'Were there a God,' think these unfortunates, with a burning sense of injustice, 'He would pay attention to my sufferings. Once He remains silent, this proves that He does not exist.'

"The only result is a wrecked life, void of happiness, and without benefit to anybody.

"Such diseased characters ought to be treated and cured in childhood. Their interest in life should be artificially educated. Novels and operas should be strictly forbidden. They should be taught history and medical science, and they should be made to work in hospitals, in order to overcome that unnatural disgust for mere physical life, which is one of their chief characteristics. They should be trained to observe their surroundings, even to express in writing their impressions of people with whom they come in contact, and to make logical deductions on

the subject of the probable futures of these people. In a word, to attach these sick creatures to earth, one must convince them that there exists nothing so interesting as humanity. Only when observation and interest in their fellow-creatures becomes a habit, will they understand the object of life. Instead of contempt, their hearts will be filled with profound pity. It is themselves, indeed, that one cannot at present regard without pity, these hapless sufferers from a deep-seated moral disease. Rancour, greed, envy, voluptuousness, cruelty, these are all spiritual ailments, needing special doctors and special medicines."

"But—" stammered Irene, "these are sins, and not diseases. You are preaching some entirely new theory."

"No; it only seems new to you, but it is actually as old as the hills. Shakespeare already described, in Othello, the symptoms of the disease of jealousy, and in Hamlet, again, he showed us a soul paralyzed by excessive self-analysis. Read the monologue of Pouschkin's 'Avaricious Knight,' and you will agree that this is the monologue of a madman. Compare

him with Molière's 'Miser,' and you will notice that both the writers have emphasized the characteristic feature of all misers: hatred of their children. Ask any doctor, and he will tell you that mental patients, in almost every case, lose the capacity to love or take an interest in their relations and friends, sometimes, indeed, manifesting a violent animosity towards them.

"It is not, indeed, only Shakespeare, or Pushkin, or Molière, it is all the science and literature of centuries, that has prepared the way for this (as you call it) 'new theory.' In our hearts, we have already long ago accepted it; we are only hesitating to proclaim it loudly, because it destroys all our laws and all our religions, and the whole working of our worn-out social machinery. We are not yet rid of the ideals of the Middle Ages; we cannot tear ourselves away from the hell that we picture to ourselves as clearly as did Dante, nor from the heaven that, in our imagination, is quite as dull and colourless as that of the immortal Florentine. But time passes, and we have reached the last days of the

Middle Ages. The New Era will begin when people will at last dare to proclaim loudly that there are no saints and sinners, but only the sick and the healthy. A healthy man can find heaven on earth, while a diseased nature lives in a worse hell than any that can be invented by the most glowing imagination. Only when we realize this, shall we understand the Gospel. Until now, during all these nineteen centuries, we have not understood it at all, but have preserved it, feeling instinctively that we shall need it in time. Christ's love for 'sinners' will become clear to us, and we ourselves shall be filled with profound pity for these sufferers. Even to-day, no one dreams of hating the insane, or being incensed against them, or punishing them. Gradually we shall begin to regard in the same light all malicious, immoral, envious natures, pitying them boundlessly for being afflicted with such cruel diseases. The teaching of Christ, hitherto but half understood, will become clear and simple."

"But, allow me!" — interrupted Irene. "How about murderers? Will you expect

us to pity them, too, and shed tears over their moral sufferings ?"

" Undoubtedly. Murderers suffer from the most terrible of all moral diseases, and therefore deserve quite particular attention. I don't know whether you have ever troubled to read accounts of the executions of criminals. I have often done so with great interest. In France, as soon as a man is condemned to death, he is fallen upon by a whole army of reporters, who repeat the minutest details to the public: what the prisoner ate, how much he drank, how he slept, and what he said. This wild chase after a sensational line sometimes unconsciously brings to light important facts. Recently, for instance, I read an account of the guillotining in a provincial town of a man who had killed his father. He had, in cold blood, cut the old man's throat, in order to come more quickly into his little inheritance. He was, of course, very soon caught—these diseased creatures always are. In prison he astonished everybody by a complete indifference to his murdered father, as

well as to his own fate. His sentence startled him for a moment, but, a minute later, he simply and confidently told his gaolers that he hoped to keep up his courage and his spirits to the last moment if, before mounting the scaffold, they could give him some black coffee and some white wine. This desire to make a show of courage before the public is the outcome of a very primitive human impulse. The lower a man's mental development, the more he gives for his neighbour's praise. Natures with loftier aspirations set a smaller value on public opinion, being, indeed, sometimes quite indifferent to it.

"The prisoner's wish is granted, and having swallowed his wine and his coffee he leaves the prison with a firm step, accompanied by a priest, who does not for a moment leave his side. On mounting the scaffold the murderer turns to the assembled crowd and makes a speech, in which he declares his complete repentance and bequeaths his ill-gotten inheritance to charities. These are of course all phrases instilled into him by the priest for the edification of the public. The

prisoner repeats them like a parrot, still for the sake of public opinion. In his heart he does not repent in the least, otherwise he could not have previously shown the supreme indifference to his dead father that had so enraged his gaolers.

"At last the comedy is over. The murderer, pleased with his pose of piety, turns round and sees the guillotine knife. Immediately, the savage brute in him awakens. He fights, struggles, scratches, bites and screams — he sells his life dearly. Four other savage brutes throw themselves on him and drag him to the knife. The crowd glumly watches the nauseating scene, and gradually disperses.

"'The public,' writes the simple-minded reporter, 'was present at the triumph of justice, but instead of joy, the prevalent impression was one of having witnessed something incomplete and unsatisfactory.'

"What wonder, indeed! Whatever laws you may invent, whatever religions you may propagate, human instinct always was, is, and will be, more reliable than them all. Instinct

pointed out to that crowd that a mistake had been made. No one knew where the mistake lay, but its disturbing presence made itself clearly felt.

"It is the same instinct that sometimes makes people act, in spite of themselves, apparently against their convictions. I remember once being taken to see a new prison, built according to the very latest ideas and principles. The criminals had not yet been transferred into their new quarters. The founder led me with pride through the enormous, lofty, light, excellently ventilated wards, showed me the perfect sanitary arrangements, the wash-stands, the hygienic beds, the luxurious baths, and the kitchen with all the latest and most modern improvements. The government had evidently built, for criminals, this magnificent sanatorium as a reward for the crimes they had committed. Leaving our honest little peasant to starve and freeze as he will, the powers that be had used the money extorted from him in taxes to provide robbers and thieves and murderers with comfortable free lodgings, including

light, warmth, excellent food and clothing! In answer to my perplexed question, the prison inspector explained to me that the prisoner is punished by being deprived of his liberty. What an explanation! Liberty is dear to people who know how to profit by it. Of what use is it to those miserable wretches who look upon vodka and cheap tobacco as life's greatest treasures? They can get both in prison, to say nothing of the gayest and most congenial society! Such prisons are a mockery of justice, and a perversion of common sense. All this and much more could be said to the Government—but the fault-finder would be wrong. The whole kernel of the matter lies in the fact that though we still refuse to accept the new teaching, though we regard it with contempt and hold it up to derision, we nevertheless instinctively already build, not prisons, but —*sanatoria.* As usual, instinct is more far-seeing than reason or the law. The time is not far off when prison inspectors (who have been transferred by chance into these new sanatoria, together with all the

remaining out-of-date paraphernalia of the old institutions) will be replaced by doctors. Then, and only then, will begin the real recovery and redemption of society, never to be attained by the naive isolation of acute cases of disease, or the destruction of sick people as if they were mad dogs."

"But how can such cures be possible? These are surely mere dreams!"

"Why mere dreams? Much has already been done—but medicine is unfortunately still in its infancy. The future will undoubtedly bring to light great discoveries—means and possibilities must only be provided for experiments. Such experiments, indeed, are already receiving attention everywhere. Only a few days ago, for instance, I read in the papers that an Italian professor, director of a gynæcological institution, had announced at a congress that, according to the results of his researches, all female criminals suffered from various severe forms of women's diseases. He suggested that instead of imprisonment they should undergo cures in gynæcological hospitals. Can you imagine

anything more wildly stupid than sentencing a woman to death, or shutting her up for life in a prison, only because she needs to undergo a surgical operation? Perhaps one can imagine just one thing that is still more uncivilized—the idea that she will burn for ever in hell, because at the birth of her children she was attended by a clumsy or ignorant midwife!

"And how many such cases do we meet at every step! I remember one of my aunts once told me how she had, in her youth, suffered from over-sensitiveness. She always imagined that everyone was laughing at her, that no one loved her, that she had constant reason to feel offended and insulted. She suffered dreadfully and began to grow positively misanthropical, hating and mistrusting everybody. Happily, chance sent her a clever doctor, who took her in hand, and put her nerves in order. Simultaneously with this improvement, her hysterical sensitiveness disappeared, and now, as soon as she suspects that she is going to have an attack of 'being offended,' she sends to the chemist for some bromide, and all is well!"

"You are joking, Sergei Grigorievitch!"

"Not in the least. We could all be of great help to doctors if we would only observe ourselves more closely. Just as people at present, when they feel indisposed, carefully note all the symptoms of their illness, and, in order to decide on a suitable cure, try to determine which of their organs is attacked, even so, some day, people will carefully note their spiritual ailments, and will treat envy, hatred, and malice just as they now treat their liver and kidneys! You are laughing, Irene Pavlovna. But indeed many a new view that seemed strange at first has, after fifty or a hundred years, become generally accepted and positively commonplace. We have, for the time being, forgotten the ancient precept *Know thyself;* if we took it to heart, we could often be our own doctors, for indeed we each have within ourselves an enormous power of self-treatment. Our Christian confessions—the so-called *examens de conscience* of the Catholics—are nothing but minute observations of ourselves. In former times people took communion, and therefore went to con-

fession, every Sunday. They were obliged, once a week, critically to examine all their actions, and to decide which of them had been sinful (*i.e.*, not normal). Beyond this they had to talk these actions over with their spiritual advisers, men chosen for this purpose because they were considered worthy of respect and confidence (*i.e.*, because they were normal and healthy). Unfortunately, however, it always happens that customs initiated by master minds for the lasting benefit of humanity, invariably, after a time, fall into the hands of incapable mediocrities, who do not understand the true meaning and object of the ideas in question, and transform them into mechanical poses, from which all sincere natures must turn away.

"A careful observation of ourselves would immensely simplify life, and would make many things much clearer to us. You, for instance, Irene Pavlovna, are sincerely convinced that the only reason why you never married is the fact that you did not meet a man who was worthy of you. Actually there was quite another reason. You simply felt a physical

disgust at thought of the realisms of marriage —the living with a man as his wife, the bearing of children, the feeding and nursing of these children. This prose sickened you, and as soon as someone was pleasing or sympathetic to you, you hastened to find or invent reasons for not marrying him. You looked for faults in him, exaggerated them, invented them, and did all you could to assure yourself that he was unworthy of you.

"In addition, marriage would really have meant too sudden a change for you—since, as is the case with all invalids, even the smallest change is a great trial for your nerves. Every trifling decision costs you many nightmares, and is accompanied by palpitation of the heart, tears, and nervous exhaustion. People like you bear every discomfort in their house rather than move into another one, and submit to the tyranny of their servants because they have not the energy to look for new ones. It is curious that such characters arrive, with the greatest ease and promptitude, at theoretical and abstract decisions. For instance, to take a furnished house

in the country and move into it for the summer is frightfully difficult, but to emigrate is very easy. One only has to read a charming description of Rome, and—good-bye, Russia! I don't want you any more! I am going to Italy, and shall become an Italian!"

"What nonsense you are talking, Sergei Grigorievitch! This is all bluff, and you are simply trying to be brilliant! I assure you I have dreamt of marriage all my life. If you only knew what touching scenes of family life I have pictured to myself! This was always my greatest delight!"

"Oh! I quite believe that! We know how to dream beautifully! And in our dreams we are always extraordinarily active! We cross oceans, found colonies, introduce ideal governments, and die as Kings or at least Presidents of Republics! In actual life, however, we groan, we are miserable, and we greatly resent being obliged to bother about going to the Bank, in order to receive the interest of the capital acquired for us by our more energetic ancestors."

"All this is untrue, and a mockery!"

"Would you like me to prove the truth of my words by an example?"

"If you like."

"Very well. Do you consider me a career-hunter?"

"Of course not. What an idea!"

"And, in your opinion, I am an honest man worthy of respect?"

"Certainly."

"In that case, what would you say if I asked you to be my wife?"

"Sergei Grigorievitch! What are you thinking about? I am much too old to marry!"

"There! I have caught you at once! As soon as the word 'marriage' is mentioned, you immediately find an excuse."

"But what I say is true! If you want to marry, you must choose a young girl who can have children."

"And how do you know that you will have no children? Are you so well acquainted with the decrees of the celestial chancery? Be sincere and say that the thought of marriage disgusts you. That will be nearer the truth."

XII

This conversation greatly perturbed Irene. She tried to assure herself that it was all nonsense; but, somehow, truth seemed to look reproachfully at her through Gzhatski's words. Many disquieting remembrances came to her mind, and for the first time in her life she made an effort to see herself as others saw her. Life had certainly, till now, never required of her any particular activity or decision. Everything had always arranged itself without trouble. She had lived for years in the flat in which her father had died, and to which she was so accustomed. Her maids had served her mechanically, and whenever one had left, friends or neighbours had immediately recommended another to take her place, so that Irene had hardly noticed the change. When she had given

parties, she had ordered the supper at a restaurant, the French manager of which had known exactly what would please her guests.

"Rapportez vous en à moi, Mademoiselle," he had usually remarked with confidence; "et vos invités n'auront pas lieu de se plaindre."

In the same way, her French dressmaker had known exactly what she should wear, and Irene had relied entirely on the Frenchwoman's good taste. In addition, she had really never had time to think out her own dresses, for, each time she had ordered one, her thoughts had rushed off to the trousseau she would some day provide for her future daughter; and the colour and fabric and fashion of all those future dresses, hats, and furs had engrossed her, for the time being, so completely that there had not been a moment left for her own immediate attire!

The greatest amount of energy Irene had ever expended had been in connection with her travels abroad—though, indeed, here also everything seemed to arrange itself without her guidance. On arriving in a strange town, she had never been allowed even to wonder

for a moment where she should stay. Having hardly set foot on the railway arrival platform, an energetic porter had invariably seized all her belongings, passed them on to some still more energetic commissionaire, and before she had had time to rub her eyes, she had been packed into an omnibus, and was comfortably driving off to some hotel. She had often reflected that there were indeed numberless kind-hearted people in the world. How many of them troubled themselves to see that she was well dressed, well fed, well housed, etc.! The money that she gave in exchange for these services seemed to her a very small matter indeed in comparison to the enormous efforts they involved.

At one time, she had greatly occupied herself with this thought. Sitting comfortably in her box at the theatre, she had wondered whether it was right that the actors should play, sing, and dance for her amusement; that cab-drivers should freeze for hours outside the theatre doors, on the chance of driving her home; that the night porter of her house should get out of bed to let her in—all

this for trifling sums of money that she could never even miss, and that she had received from her father. Was it not an impossible arrangement of society, by which so many people worked for one idler? The question had greatly disturbed Irene's peace of mind; but just at that time she had been asked to join a society for providing poor young mothers with layettes for their babies. The object of this society was pleasing to Irene, and all her disturbing thoughts had lost themselves in an enormous ardour for knitting babies' counterpanes. There is scarcely another manual occupation that needs as little attention as knitting. One can knit a whole counterpane so mechanically that one has hardly noticed how it happened. And so, Irene had knitted and knitted during all the long winter evenings, while her thoughts had rushed from one fancy to another. She had reorganized the Russian army and fleet; she had thought out schools of a new type, from which issued the most remarkable, active, energetic people; she had rebuilt Petrograd; she had planned new railways and laid out a

new network of canals, uniting all Russia's inland seas.

And all the time, the counterpanes had grown and grown, till at last Irene had been able proudly to present an enormous number of completed ones to the society. She had been happy in the thought that if the workmen of Petrograd provided her with all the necessaries of life, she in return provided their children with counterpanes. In this way, justice and an even balance had been restored.

It is true that the society had also imposed on its members the duty of visiting the mothers. This duty, however, Irene had point blank refused to take upon herself. It was preposterous, she had thought. What would happen if she were by chance to arrive somewhere at a moment when a child was being born? She would hear the mother's groans and see the red, wrinkled infant. She did not even know very exactly how it all happens, and she had shuddered at the very idea of witnessing anything so nauseating. In general, she had always felt a natural disgust for

everything physical, and had never brought herself to glance without a shudder at the simplest anatomical design. In the case in point, indeed, she had preferred to knit ten extra counterpanes rather than see one of the babies for whom they were destined.

She now remembered also how she had always loved to escape from real life into the enchanted realms of novels and poems. People in books were always so charming, and all their thoughts and actions so comprehensible. They all invariably had a clear, well-defined object in life, and strove through a few hundred engrossing pages to attain this object. They were all noble and generous, and their lives were bright and beautiful. What interesting and delightful moments Irene had passed in their society! They had made her laugh and cry and suffer and rejoice, and had entertained her with the brilliancy of their wit. How dull and colourless real people had appeared beside these heroes and heroines of fiction. Real people never seemed to know for what purpose they existed, nor what to do with their lives; their

characters were nearly always illogical and uninteresting; they were married stupidly and aimlessly, and generally to the wrong people; they just as aimlessly bore children, and did nothing but reproach them for having exactly the same faults as themselves; if, however, one of the children who had caused them nothing but torments and trouble died, they made a terrific fuss, wrung their hands in despair, and cursed God. How could Irene respect such people? Ah! if she had met in real life a Prince Andrey, from "Peace and War," how passionately she would have loved him! And what an intimate friend she would have made of Pushkin's Tatiana! How they would have understood each other! How much they would have had in common! Irene had often assured her friends in fun that no man in the world appealed to her as much as Sherlock Holmes.

Thinking over all this, Irene suddenly, with a shock, realized that Gzhatski was perfectly right, that she had really never lived, but had only slumbered and dreamt, and had in this way let her youth slip by. Having now un-

derstood her own illness, was there still time for a cure, for a return to normal life? Could she renounce her contempt for humanity? Could she try to love human nature, in spite of its defects? Could she live in the world, sharing its joys and sorrows? Or was it too late? Was not Père Etienne, perhaps, persuading her to take the veil just for that self-same reason? Did not the clever priest, perhaps, regard her simply as a nervous patient, and was he not possibly trying by every possible ruse to lure her into a convent as one lures lunatics into an asylum? The thought was painful.

Gzhatski, in the meantime, having proposed to Irene in jest, knowing perfectly well that she would refuse, had suddenly, once the proposal was made and rejected, begun to think seriously about marrying her. He had for some years past quite given up his old dreams of marriage, but having during the autumn previous to his Italian journey spent two lonely months in the country, away from all his friends, alone with an old devoted but badly trained servant, Gzhatski had often

meditated with some sadness on the failure of his cherished plans, and on the lonely old age that awaited him. Irene's innocence and simple-mindedness appealed to him, and emphatically as he assured her that indifference to wealth and position was a symptom of disease, this particular symptom was, nevertheless, in her case, pleasing to him. Her moral purity reminded him of his mother, though, indeed, one could hardly imagine two more diverse characters: the one deeply and passionately religious, the other embittered and indifferent even to her shattered ideals.

Taking advantage of the impression produced on Irene's mind by the "Life of Saint Amulfia," and her resultant disillusionment on the subject of convents, Gzhatski persuaded her to venture a little out of her seclusion, and to see something of Roman society. The season was in full swing. Crowds of English and American tourists were besieging the hotels, and were being pitilessly fleeced. The Costanzi theatre engaged one famous singer after another, and great society hostesses vied with each other in the brilli-

ancy of their receptions. Armies of peasant women and their children, in picturesque national costumes, wandered down from the Albanian hills to sell flowers to the *forestieri* (foreigners). Old Rome seemed to have grown young again, and basked gaily in the golden spring sunshine.

Gzhatski took Irene to the Horse Show, organized by the fashionable "Fox-hunters' Club." Fox-hunting, the recreation of the most aristocratic Roman circles, is a feature of the winter season. The perfect roads traversing the Campagna, the splendid views, the fresh air, the invigorating canter across the plain, a little harmless flirtation with the most elegant of equestriennes, all this is dear to the heart of the fashionable Roman. As to the foxes, they suffer but little at the hands of their aristocratic hunters!

"The fox is an old Roman," the more sincere sportsmen often frankly admit—"he knows every inch of the Campagna, much better than we do, and rarely lets himself be caught."

In answer to any question about the hunt,

Roman "High Life" almost invariably asserts that the day was superb. "At the start, a fox was raised, but managed to evade the hunters, and finally escaped."

Evil tongues, indeed, assert that these foxes are mechanical, and are wound up and started before every hunt! But then—what strange rumours will not evil tongues invent! The sportsmen are never discouraged, and it is under their auspices that the annual Horse Show is organized.

On arriving at the Tor di Fiorenza, Irene was greeted by a scene as picturesque as it was new and unfamiliar to her. The races were held in a valley between low hills, the obstacles being scattered not only over the level ground, but also on the grassy slopes. The course, indeed, was a bewilderingly winding one, up-hill and down-hill, the last and most difficult barrier being placed at a considerable height, followed by a steep incline down to the winning-post.

Some of the jockeys were flung over this last barrier, head forwards! Their riderless horses, taking the leap by themselves, quietly

turned aside and began to regale themselves on the fresh grass, while the soldiers on guard picked up what was left of the unconscious sportsmen!

There were no seats of any kind provided for the public. The fashionable onlookers stood about on the grass, or sat on folding stools they had brought with them; others even, when overtired, seated themselves on the damp ground. Sometimes, the public pressed so close to the barriers that they were actually in the way, and one of the judges on horseback approached, courteously requesting the crowd to stand back. Children, brought there for some unknown reason, arranged little races and competitions of their own, and skipped merrily up and down the hills, to the delight of their parents. The Roman is a tender father, and is not ashamed of his tenderness. For that matter, the Romans present were probably in the minority, every possible nationality being represented in the assemblage. The manner, attire, and general appearance of all cosmopolitan aristocrats being similar, one could only distinguish the

various nationalities of those present by the accent with which they spoke French, the language almost universally adopted in Roman society. Irene studied the animated picture before her with great interest. The weather was lovely. The recent rains had covered the whole valley with a carpet of new, green grass, from which peeped, here and there, a shy, little early field-flower. The air was fragant with the scent of spring, and the pink and white bloom of the cherry-trees contrasted strangely with the solemn darkness of the Roman pines. The gay, elegant crowd laughed and chatted around Irene, and her glance wandered, with a curious sense of strangeness, from one face to another. These handsome, well dressed men, these dainty, fashionable ladies, probably making the Horse Show an excuse for some rendezvous, seemed to her to belong to some other world, and to have indeed nothing whatever in common with the ex-nun, as she, with some bitterness, called herself.

XIII

Little by little, however, Irene let herself be drawn into the whirl of Italian social life. Italian society is one of the most interesting and delightful societies in the world. It is indeed impossible not to love these charming, sympathetic, gay, splendidly accomplished and witty Southerners. What a difference between their sparkling and brilliant receptions, and the dull, heavy entertainments of Petrograd! Nowhere in Rome did Irene meet those gloomy, silent figures that wander forlornly about Petrograd drawing-rooms, only waiting for supper. They do not exist in Italy, neither does the supper. At the most brilliant receptions, there is never more than one table for light refreshments, tea, ices, wines, lemonade. Most of the guests, however, never even approach this table, but

prefer, on returning home, to drink a glass of cold water, of the purity of which Romans are prouder than of the Colosseum or the Forum. They go to receptions, not for the sake of eating and drinking, but rather for laughter and flirtation and brilliant conversation. At almost every social gathering there is music and recitation. Everybody recites: poets, poetesses, and ordinary mortals. The Italian language, especially as spoken in Rome, is so musical that the recitations give pleasure even to foreigners who do not understand their meaning. There is great variety in this fashionable art. An old poet rises, requests that most of the lights may be extinguished, takes an effective attitude, and begins, with theatrical intensity, to raise and to lower his voice, rather, indeed, to sing than to speak. He is listened to with attention, but the younger generation smiles: "The old school," it whispers disdainfully.

He is followed by a young representative of modern ideas, a North Italian poetess, on a visit to Rome. She is dressed in decadent green draperies (that suit her perfectly, by

the way!), and to the accompaniment of angular, decadent gestures, she begins to recite her lines, simply, and in a natural voice. The simplicity is studied, to the point of becoming almost a mannerism. The young people, however, are delighted, especially the men, who gaze with undisguised pleasure at the beautiful poetess.

But suddenly there steps into the centre of the room a young girl amateur, the daughter of a Roman prefect. She recites some verses by d'Annunzio. This is neither the old nor the new school, but simply a burning young Italian soul, and the charming, unaffected sincerity of her art is rewarded by storms of applause.

To singing or piano-playing Italians listen with even still greater attention. No one talks, but each listener seems lost in rapture. No one who can perform hesitates or affectedly waits to be asked half a dozen times; on the contrary, everyone is burning to show off his talent. They enjoy their own performances, and, inspired by the almost religious attention of their hearers, sing more glori-

ously than would ever be possible in the chilly North.

Art, indeed, and the worship of beauty, is the only religion of the Romans. "Art for art's sake," they declare, as they laugh at modern realistic literature.

"Every time we attempt to represent some inward struggle," complained a famous Italian lady novelist to Irene, "the critics hold us up to ridicule, and say we are imitating Russian writers!"

To tell a Roman writer that his work is pervaded by a Christian spirit is to offend him deeply. He has only one ideal: his verses or his prose must as nearly as possible resemble antique art. The true Roman has a profound contempt for Christianity, a religion, in his eyes, suited only to slaves and low menials, and not to nobler natures. The Roman is a pagan, and is proud of the fact. Nineteen centuries have passed unnoticeably for him. The Eternal City, with its antique ruins, and its ancient associations, holds him enchained. In Northern Italy new ideas, new tendencies, may be possible—

but Rome will remain pagan for ever. Perhaps, indeed, this may explain the strong impression Rome produces on many foreigners. There are, in the world, many pagans, on whom life in Christian lands weighs heavily. They have to take part in conversations about love, about unselfishness, about kindness to one's neighbours, etc., and, being honourable characters, this enforced hypocrisy causes them much mental torment. In Rome, where everyone is frankly pagan, and not in the least ashamed of the fact, they feel like fishes in water, and often settle there for the rest of their lives.

Most humorous of all is the fact that all this pagan world lives in the shadow of the Papal throne. In the eyes of Romans, however, the Pope has never been the High-Priest of Christ on earth. He is simply the Pontifex Maximus, and does not even wish anyone to regard him in any other light. Romans, indeed, make a point of disillusioning every religiously inclined foreigner they come across by laughing at him and holding his pious ideas up to ridicule. If he returns

in a reverent mood from a visit to the tomb of St. Peter, they hasten to inform him that, according to historical evidence, the Apostle Peter had never been in Rome, and that his place of burial is unknown. As to the Apostle Paul and other Christian martyrs, their bones were exhumed and their ashes thrown to the winds at the time of the Barbarian invasion.

Romans make jokes about their miraculous images, laugh at miracles, relate indecent stories about cardinals, priests, and monks, and present caricatures of them on the stage No wonder, indeed, that many pious pilgrims have lost their faith in Rome.

Among the many completely pagan superstitions that are still extant in Roman society, the most notoriously absurd is that in connection with so-called *Jetatori.* Irene had heard of this superstition while yet in Russia, but had thought that it was in vogue solely among the ignorant lower classes of Naples. What then was her astonishment on coming across it in the most enlightened circles of Roman society! If a Roman passes an acquaintance in the street without

noticing him and bowing, or if he fails to invite him to one of his parties, the offended one revenges himself by announcing the other to be a *Jetator*. Thereupon, society, immediately, as one man, turns its back on the latter! If by some chance, and in the face of public opinion, some specially fearless soul invites a *Jetator* to a reception, no one dreams of speaking to him, it is considered dangerous even to look at him, and heaven forbid, indeed, that one should be obliged to sit next to him! No one even mentions him, as the very sound of his name is supposed to bring misfortune. Only great wealth and high rank can save any Roman from falling under this ban. Saddest of all, however, is the fact that the wife and children and all the relations of the *Jetator* share his evil influence, and, therefore, his hard fate. Irene once happened to meet, at a luncheon party, the accidentally invited wife of a *Jetator*. Two ladies, who had been obliged to sit next to the evil one, were taken seriously ill on the same day, one with her customary liver complaint, and the other with

a severe cold, having gone out too soon after an attack of influenza! Both cases were, of course, attributed to the unfortunate woman, to whom, after this occurrence, every door in Rome was closed with redoubled vigilance.

Irene was astonished to find that this superstition was shared also by the majority of the foreigners in Rome, who seemed to become infected by it on their arrival, and were cured only on their departure from the Eternal City. Such a peculiarity can only be explained by the almost unbearable force of the impression that Rome makes on most strangers. In all the rest of our contemporary great cities, we live in the twentieth century. On arriving in Rome, we are suddenly plunged into the very heart of antiquity, then rushed, without a moment's warning, into the Middle Ages, with their Vatican, their churches, their convents, and their palaces, or flung into the whirlpool of the most brilliant and fashionable modernity. All these elements are bound up together, and one passes from one to the other in a day. The human mind is incapable of such an immense effort, becomes

unbalanced, and is ready to accept and believe the wildest nonsense.

Another pagan feature in the Roman character is the extraordinary attachment of all Romans to their native city. The first question that is put to every stranger on his arrival is: "Do you like Rome?" and woe to the simple-minded foreigner who answers in the negative! The dark eyes of the incredulous Roman sparkle with indignation and astonishment, which gradually give place to a pitying contempt for the ignorant simpleton! In vain the latter tries to atone for his mistake by remarking that he does not dislike Venice or Florence. This does not touch or interest the Romans at all. In spite of a superficial union, Italy consists, as much as ever, of a number of separate states. Admiration of Venice or Naples can only offend a Roman. The stranger tries hard to explain that it is impossible to admire a town that is entirely lacking in harmony, and in which the modern buildings erected by the government nearly give one convulsions, such an eyesore is their dazzling whiteness on the background of the

yellow, ancient city. He repeats in vain that being accustomed, at home, to broad, well-lighted avenues, he cannot but regard with disgust the narrow, dark alleys of the ancient quarters of Rome, while, being used to clear air and constantly watered streets, he is still more profoundly disgusted at the clouds of that particularly objectionable yellow dust that rise with every gust of wind blowing over Rome.

The Roman listens gloomily to the stranger, but is not convinced. He is not consoled by the admission that his city is very original, and that every educated man ought to see it. He requires and expects love and admiration for his "Cara Roma," the adored fair one, for whom he would willingly die. Irene envied the Romans this fervour and the love of home which forced all inhabitants, before temporarily leaving the city, to drink of the water of the famous Fontana Trevi, and throw a coin into the fountain—superstitiously assuring themselves by this means that they would safely return. No other nation in the world has invented such a poetic superstition as this.

Being a pagan, it follows that the Roman is the most loving of fathers and the most dutiful of sons. As he knows nothing about Christianity or love and charity towards his neighbour in the broad sense, he laughs at such ideas as absurdities, and gives all the love of his heart to his own family. On public holidays, fathers are everywhere to be seen leading by the hand tiny children in their Sunday frocks, treating them to chocolate and cakes at the fashionable confectioners, and talking caressingly with them. Or else one meets young married couples, accompanied by nurses who, with airs of vast importance, carry on cushions three-weeks-old infants, concealed under clouds of lace. Babies are not hidden away in back rooms, as in other countries. From the moment of their birth, children have their rights and privileges, and, in the arms of their nurses, receive visitors!

But although Romans love and respect their little ones, they never become the slaves of the children. On the contrary, it is the parents who are adored and deeply respected, the children seeing in them the principal

representatives of their race. There are in Rome countless aged fathers and mothers who live in palaces and drive about in magnificent motor-cars, while their children struggle to make both ends meet, going about on foot and living in small flats. No one would ever dream of depriving his parents of anything for his own benefit, or for the sake of his children, as, alas! so often happens in Russia. This love of one's race and one's family is the foundation stone of Latin civilization. In the northern countries that have received their civilization through Christianity this love is not nearly so pronounced. Christianity does not encourage family interests, but, on the contrary, demands that all men should be brothers. Romans have succeeded in remaining deaf to these demands, and have kept their ancient Latin character. This is most noticeable in the Roman museums, where the types represented by the antique statues bear the most striking resemblance to modern Romans.

The Roman has remained true to the pagan passion for luxury and magnificence.

Nowhere in the world can one see so many private carriages as in Rome. No self-respecting Roman goes about on foot. He must have a carriage to drive through the Corso, and, at the fashionable hour, on the Pincio. He does not care about the elegance of his horses or their harness, but his carriage must have red and yellow wheels, and his grooms must have smart liveries. In their deep-seated victorias fashionable Roman beauties lean back lazily under their enormous ostrich-plumed hats, their knees covered, not, as elsewhere, by a common traditional plaid travelling rug, but by a magnificent bear-skin or tiger-skin, the paws hanging down over the wheels.

The prices at the Costanzi Theatre are colossal. A box costs as much as £6; yet the opera is always crowded, and not only this, but the men appear in evening dress, and the ladies in low neck and diamonds! This southern cult of elegance and luxury, indeed, is in evidence everywhere. Roman women never wear everyday clothes. They always seem to be in fancy dress, appearing

in fantastic bright scarlet, yellow, or green costumes, with golden caps and golden serpents. They all wear numerous necklaces, combs, buckles, brooches, mostly imitations of the antique, for which Roman jewellers are famous. This style of dress would be absurd in the North, but it suits the Roman beauties to perfection.

In spite of its paganism, however, Roman society nevertheless belongs to and is closely linked with the great family of social Europe from which Russia is hopelessly separated by centuries of culture. Irene was charmed to notice, for instance, how much universal sympathy and attention were lavished, in Roman social circles, on a foreign authoress, who was studying Roman life with a view to making it the subject of her next work. Everyone tried to help her; closed doors were opened for her, and meetings with interesting people were willingly arranged. Nobody troubled to find out whether she was talented or not, or whether her work would be translated into Italian. She had expressed a desire to work, and that was quite enough.

In the same way they helped an American, known in Europe as the Book King, to form his library. This American was a very representative example of a curious modern type produced, so far, only by the New World. Nobody knew where he had lived and what he had done in his youth. He had been born, so to say, at forty years of age, when, having made a fortune, he crossed the ocean, appeared in Paris, and announced his desire to form a library composed entirely of the works of contemporary writers, each volume to be autographed by the author, who must add a few words to explain what special idea he had intended to express in the work in question. The enterprising Yankee was profoundly ignorant, had never read anything at all, and had never heard of names known to all the world. Also he was as tactless as the majority of his compatriots; but, with true American insistence, he applied to everybody, pestered people pitilessly, and really ended by getting together a very interesting collection of books. It was his express desire that this collection should be sent to America, and

should never again leave American soil; and yet, so great is Italian generosity, on the collector's arrival in Rome everyone helped him by making out lists of Italian writers and by introducing him to literary people.

Involuntarily, while observing all these facts, Irene's thoughts strayed back to her own country, where, alas! things were arranged very differently. With the exception of a very limited circle of people educated in the European fashion, all the rest of Russian society is nothing but a crowd of ignorant, lazy, uncivilized bears, who spend all their lives lying half-asleep in their dens, and sucking their paws. Woe, indeed, to him who may occasionally attempt to wish for something better than this beloved, national, loutish existence, or who may perhaps by chance not only have an idea, but also a vague desire to work at it! What a howl of displeasure and derision makes itself heard in all the dens! "What!" wail the bears, "renounce our idleness, and our laziness, and our true Russian eternal nagging and

grumbling? How dares he! Murder! Treason! Cry him down! Kill him!"

All the rest of Europe has long been intelligent enough to understand that even the most microscopic effort, when added to other efforts, produces a total of labour that must be of use to all the world. Alas! It will be a very long time before the dull, stupid Russian bears are brought to understand even something so simple as this!

Irene was particularly attracted by Italian women. These charming creatures have neither nerves nor caprices. They are kind and amiable, they make friends easily, and they are ready to be of assistance to every foreigner they come across. Never once did Irene see, at Roman gatherings, anything resembling the anxious, world-worn expressions of the young girls who fill Petrograd drawing-rooms.

"Shall I ever meet my fate? Shall I have many children? Shall I be happy?" say their pale, sad, restless faces. Italian girls are bright and gay and happy. They delight in the sunshine, the flowers, and the

spring-time of their own lives. They have no need to fear the future, for they know that to Italian men love is as necessary as air. They will never, indeed, have to deal with miserable Petrograd worldlings, who may try as they will to squeeze a drop of tenderness out of their icy hearts, but will always die without having succeeded!

Irene was quite astonished at herself for finding Italian society so attractive. She, a stranger, speaking another language, holding another faith, felt quite at home in its circles. She looked back with a shudder at the old days in Petrograd, and at the bitter sense of resentment and irritation with which she had invariably returned home from all social gatherings. Here, Irene delighted in those exquisite sensual entertainments, with their music, their singing, their recitations. On leaving them, she loved to take deep breaths of the balmy night air, feeling that soft sense of luxury that a tired wanderer experiences on getting into a warm, fragrant bath. "How am I to explain all this?" wondered Irene.

Alas! Like most of us, Irene did not know herself. It never occurred to her that since her earliest childhood she had never been anything but a pagan. Whereas, however, Roman paganism was hereditary and the result of centuries of voluntary enslavement to antique culture and its ideals, Irene's paganism was simply a morbid disease. Like sufferers from progressive paralysis, who gradually sink into a state of primitive bestiality, so a diseased soul not only cannot develop, but cannot even maintain itself on a level with its contemporaries, and invariably slips back to the ideals of a past civilization.

XIV

Of all the Roman houses in which Irene visited, she most liked that of Count Primoli, who, during the season, entertained the whole of cosmopolitan Rome in his luxurious villa. Count Primoli was only half an Italian. Through his mother, a Princess Bonaparte, he was French, of which fact he was very proud. He was a delightful mixture of French wit and Italian gaiety and hospitality. Absolutely everyone went to his Wednesdays and Saturdays! The diplomatic world, famous Italian writers, French painters and journalists, celebrated singers, Indian princes, American millionaires, Russians, Swedes, and Englishmen. Romans of the higher circles visited him with pleasure, even though they disapproved of his cosmopolitanism. Count Primoli was undis-

mayed by this disapproval, for he well knew what a service he was rendering to society.

Gloomy dullards never see anything in receptions and other social gatherings but frivolous distractions, necessary, perhaps, to youth, but positively reprehensible when indulged in by older people. In truth, however, balls and parties of every description are indispensable to all human beings and to the maintenance of their moral and mental health. A man who leads a solitary confined existence loses his equilibrium. He ceases to see things in their just perspective, exaggerates and misunderstands everything, looks at life tragically, and makes mountains out of mole-hills.

As soon as he leaves off isolating himself, comes in contact with other people, exchanges ideas with them, laughs and talks a little, his mental balance is restored, and the mountains become mole-hills again, Also, the more various are the people he meets, the more his mind broadens and develops. People who exclusively frequent their own immediate circles, be they aristocratic or

otherwise, invariably grow dull and stupid. That is why the hospitable host who receives very mixed gatherings renders a great service to society — though society itself is shortsighted enough not to recognize this service.

To receive on a large scale is not as easy as people think. It by no means suffices to be rich and to issue invitations broadcast. The principal thing is to know how to receive one's guests, an accomplishment attainable only on the two following conditions: Aristocratic extraction and love of humanity. At least three or four generations of well-born and wealthy people accustomed to social surroundings are needed for the production of a good host. Everyone who has been in the house of a *nouveau riche* knows that he felt, on that occasion, as though he were in a restaurant. The hosts did not know how to greet their visitors, nor how to introduce or unite them, so the latter ate and drank, and having witnessed what entertainment was provided for them, left, sometimes even forgetting to say good-bye to the hosts. A

love of humanity is as indispensable to a good host as blue blood, and Count Primoli may be said to have been richly endowed with both these qualifications. He was a true "Grand Seigneur," and knew how to make his guests feel at home. He sincerely loved them all, and wished to give them pleasure. There were some vulgar people who made fun of his charming cordiality. Had he forgotten to invite them, or had he treated them with lofty disdain, they would immediately have begun to respect him. Nice people, however, valued his kind heart, and took no notice of the silly anecdotes that rumour spread about him.

Like all ideal hosts, Count Primoli loved his beautiful villa, and never tired of improving it.

"Je veux que ma maison ne ressemble à nulle autre," he said to his friends.

This was not easy to attain, since, in our day, it is hardly possible to invent anything really new or original. Thanks to railways, steamships, newspapers, and journals, life grows every day more level and commonplace. Almost all the world lives, eats, and

dresses alike. The women of Greenland know the latest fashions as well as their Parisian sisters. The cannibals of Central Asia, imitating English lords, put on smoking-suits when they sit down to eat their roasted neighbours. The aristocratic drawing-rooms of Pekin are furnished like those of Madrid. Dinners, balls, receptions, are alike everywhere, and people travel from one end of the earth to the other noticing hardly any difference.

Count Primoli, however, managed to attain his object, and his receptions, once witnessed, were not easily forgotten.

Already, on driving up to the entrance of his villa, one felt a sense of gaiety and pleasure. The small covered courtyard was carpeted for the occasion and was decorated with flowers and the Bonaparte arms. A majestic outdoor servant, theatrically attired, received the carriages as they drove up. In the square hall, on each side of the door, stood rows of footmen, in long gold-embroidered satin tail-coats, knee breeches, white silk stockings, and buckled shoes, an original,

old, and now extinct French fashion of dressing house-servants.

The costumes of these footmen, indeed, were so splendid, that many people were sure they must be original ancient liveries of the Bonaparte family, and ought to be in glass cases in a museum. Perhaps this was true; but it is nevertheless a fact that the liveries were much more effective and much more clearly remembered on the shoulders of footmen than they would have been had they been hidden in a museum. The guests, on arrival, felt that they had left their humdrum daily existence outside the door, and that they had entered the enchanted realms of fairyland. Like children who expect a Christmas-tree and surprises, they crossed the hall, with its wonderful arm-chairs of velvet and cloth of gold, and its enormous sofa, covered with fur rugs and decorated with masks from Greek tragedy. Then up the staircase, over the balustrade of which were thrown priceless brocades of all shades and colours, the walls being hung with Chinese embroideries and fans of peacock-feathers.

Upstairs, the elegant drawing-rooms, with their pink curtains and gilt furniture, were wonderful and interesting museums of Napoleonic souvenirs. Count Primoli honoured the memory of his famous great-uncle, Napoleon I., and carefully preserved all Napoleonic relics. There were masks and miniatures of the great Emperor, and other ancient family treasures, jewelled combs, fans, lace, snuff-boxes, letters, seals, and silhouettes. In a prominent place stood a large glass case, brilliantly illuminated, containing two dresses: one of green velvet, embroidered with gold, from the wardrobe of the Empress Josephine, and the other of lace over a pink foundation, the priceless robe of Marie Louise. At the side lay fans and satin slippers, to match the dresses. On the walls of the room were shelves, and on them signed photographs of the present-day members of the Bonaparte family.

Another remarkable and charming peculiarity of the villa was the wealth of flowers with which it was always decorated. Magnificent azaleas of all shades stood about every-

where, garlands of lilac were suspended from one chandelier to the other, and other garlands of hyacinths, roses, and violets, surrounded the glass cases, wound themselves round the shelves, and framed the looking-glasses.

"Quella fantasmorgia dei fiore!" laughed Roman Princesses and Countesses, as they entered. It is strange that Roman women, who are surrounded by flowers that grow in the open air all the year round, do not really care for them, and only decorate their rooms with them because it is the fashion, and because it pleases foreigners. Count Primoli, however, was a great lover of flowers, and so completely filled his villa with them that one grew faint with the sweetness of their overpowering fragrance. The air, indeed, was full of something romantic and reminiscent—one thought of old Italy and the Renaissance.

"Quand je vais chez le Comte Primoli," said a foreign lady once, "j'ai toujours envie de parler en vers, et de demander un sorbet aux domestiques"—and there were many who shared this impression.

The crowd at these receptions was always composed of the most varied cosmopolitan elements. There was the Chinese Ambassador, who, having but yesterday cut off his "pigtail," had thrown off his flowered robe, and wore European dress clothes with the ease and *chic* of a London clubman. There was the American Ambassador, whose quiet dignity stood out in relief against the noisy vulgarity of his numerous compatriots. There were members of all the Embassies with their wives, the latter attired, according to the custom of luxurious Rome, in beautiful Paris dresses, low-necked, and even in some cases set off by wonderful diamond ornaments or tiaras. All Western women consider themselves queens, and by no means object to sometimes wearing crowns, as a sign of their high rank.

Loveliest of all, however, was the Russian singer L——, recently arrived in Rome to fulfil an engagement at the Costanzi theatre. Perfectly dressed, and wearing wonderful pearls, she was modest, dignified, and charming. The arrival of the famous French painter, Carolus

Duran, was greeted by exclamations from all sides: "Comment allez-vous, cher maître? Quel bonheur de vous voir!" But, as was to be expected from a painter, the great Frenchman was immediately attracted by the beautiful singer; and the latter, having previously announced that she never sang in private houses, offered, on learning that the charming and universally beloved old man had never heard her, to make an exception for his benefit. The painter was so sympathetic and irresistible, that no one was surprised at her wish to sing to him. He was, indeed, the personification of all that is best in France: industrious democracy, firm principles, and profound belief in God and in the triumph of right and justice.

An excellent tenor and an experienced accompanist, never very far away in Rome, were immediately forthcoming. They disappeared for a moment with Madame L——, and then returned to the principal drawing-room, into which all the visitors crowded to admire and enjoy what was sure to be an exquisite performance.

The artists sang excerpts from "Traviata" and "Tosca," and, as her last number, Madame L—— gave some Russian melodies.

The applause was rapturous. With remarkable warmth and kindness, many of the listeners congratulated not only L—— herself, but also all the other Russians who happened to be present. For the first time in her life, Irene realized that it was possible to be proud of someone else's success.

"These foreigners," observed the Bulgarian Minister to Irene, in perfect Russian, "always imagine that we Slavs live on tallow candles. It is good to be able to show them what our songs are like, and our singers and our national Slavonic genius."

While listening to L——, Irene had observed the public, and had noticed many envious glances levelled at the singer. "Why should she have everything?" they seemed to say—"beauty, talent, splendid dresses, and jewels!"

Irene would have liked to console them with the answer that every singer, every actress, indeed every great talent is endowed

by fate not only with wealth and success, but also with a profound capacity for suffering. No one can sing well, play well, or write well, without living through moments of the deepest pain and anguish. Every real talent has known times of torturing depression when the heart in its agony has cried out to God: "Why hast Thou forsaken me? What have I done that I should suffer so?"

And then, at the very darkest moment, suddenly, the veil is torn from their eyes! Truth, with her flaming torch, stands before them, and they understand that God sends them suffering to strengthen and ennoble their talent, that it may touch men's hearts and show to tired wanderers on earth glimpses of heaven.

Having once grasped this fact, men and women of talent humbly bow their heads before God's will. Uncomplainingly and nobly they bear the insatiable yearning that tears their souls, accepting success with indifference, since they know that their own personal fame is but a secondary matter, and

plays but a minor part in their mission on earth.

Irene felt that there comes a moment in the life not only of every artist, writer, or musician, but also in that of every thinking human being, when nature asks him her great question: "Canst thou relinquish personal interests and help me in my work for humanity?" On his answer depends his soul's serenity, the peace of his old age, and his faith in God and the justice of God's ways. For should he indeed refuse, should he harden his heart against his brothers, a despair so boundless will take possession of his soul that there will be no escape or loophole but—suicide.

Irene wondered, with a shudder, what her own answer to the fateful question would be.

XV

"Let us go to the Palazzo M——," suggested Gzhatski to Irene one bright, sunny morning towards the middle of March. "They have a very interesting family festival there to-day, and except in Rome you will nowhere see anything similar."

So they drove to the old quarter of Rome, where most of the palaces of the Roman aristocracy are to be found.

The exterior of the Palazzo M—— was in no sense strikingly beautiful. It was built in something like a semi-circle, which fact seemed in old times, when the street was narrow, perfectly natural. Now, however, the Corso being straight and broad, the effect is peculiar. At some time in the Middle Ages, Saint Philip of Neri had worked a miracle in this palace, having

brought back to life a dead child of the M—— family.

Saint Philip had entered the room a moment after little Paolo M—— had breathed his last, and had found the parents sobbing with grief and despair over the body of their beloved boy. Touched by their sorrow, the Saint had commanded the departed one to arise, upon which Paolo had immediately come back to life. "Why have you brought me back to earth?" he had asked his parents, in tones of reproach. "I was so happy *there!*" Struck by these words, the parents had prayed Saint Philip to let Paolo die again, and the Saint, with a wave of his hand, had released the innocent young soul, that it might fly back to a happier world.

This miracle had been performed on a 16th of March, and, to the present day, the top floor of the palazzo, with the chapel in which the remains of Saint Philip repose, is thrown open every year on that date to the people of Rome. In an unbroken stream the neighbouring poor with their little children, monks and nuns, as well as the inevitable

tourists, ascend and descend the splendid staircase. The entrance to the palace is decorated for the occasion with flags and brightly-coloured draperies. In the doorway stands a servant in gold-embroidered uniform, the courtyard is crowded, and heads peep from all the little windows of the third floor.

The rooms leading to the chapel are low, with wood-panelled ceilings, narrow windows, and furniture of the Middle Ages. The chapel itself is brilliantly illuminated. Women, one after another, fall on their knees and pray fervently. This is a children's festival, particularly dear to mothers. Monks and nuns repeat the legend in detail to the assembled crowd, the Roman poor listening reverently and with emotion, the tourists looking on with mocking smiles.

On the same day, in the great reception rooms below, the princely M—— family receives its friends, from four to seven. The family is of ancient and historic lineage, tracing its origin back to pre-Christian Rome. Like all the rest of the Roman aristocracy the princes

are religious Catholics, firm in their allegiance to the Vatican.

Irene's gaze wandered in mute admiration round the enormous entrance-hall, with its magnificent painted ceiling, its antique statues, and the crimson baldaquin at one of its walls. Only the most ancient families in Rome possess such a baldaquin. Under it stands the chair reserved in old days for the use of the Pope, who frequently honoured noble Romans with his visits. Across the balustrade surrounding this throne, footmen, in most wonderful blue and cerise liveries, were laying the wraps of arriving visitors, to whom at the same time a house-steward in black dress clothes and a heavy chain was handing a visitors' book for signature. Beyond the hall could be seen long enfilades of rooms, with magnificent tapestries, pictures, statues, and many other ancient treasures of art not to be met with elsewhere. Irene particularly noticed a jewel-case in the shape of a girl's figure carved in wood, and coloured.

The guests were assembled in the principal drawing-room, an immense room with a

painted wooden ceiling of the fifteenth century. The walls were hung with crimson brocade, and covered with pictures by old masters. The portières were of heavy crimson velvet, the furniture was massive and gilt. In the middle of the room, over the red felt with which the floor was covered, lay two large white bear-skins, the only compatriots Irene met at this reception.

The whole M—— family was present, grandfather, grandmother, and grandson (a handsome boy of fifteen, dressed in the uniform of one of the Roman colleges)—even an eight-months-old infant in a film of white lace, presiding majestically on the knees of his nurse, an Albanian peasant woman, attired in her picturesque national costume. The tiny prince seemed to be enjoying himself more than anyone else, energetically and with gurgles of delight pulling the moustache of every man and tearing off the veil of every lady who bent over him! It was charming to see the indescribable tenderness with which the whole family regarded this latest representative of their ancient race!

In general, the festival was patriarchal and aristocratic to the highest degree—aristocratic in the true fashion of ancient times, when the nobles, really loving the people, befriended them and opened their doors to them on all festive occasions. It was so in all countries, and that wholly un-Christian and senseless gulf which now separates one class from another only came into being with the formation of the middle class, uncertain of itself, having no ground under its feet, dragging hopelessly after the aristocracy, and kicking back with hatred and repulsion the lower classes from which it had so recently risen.

At one end of the drawing-room stood a tea table, and, according to a charming Roman custom, tea, chocolate, and ices were offered to the visitors. Italians can drink hot chocolate and eat ices almost at the same time, without dying!

Irene sat down in a corner, and watched the scene before her with delighted interest. She thought of how, in Petrograd, anything connected with Catherine the Great or Alexander I. was considered ancient. Such

antiquity might, here, in this Roman Palace, be looked upon as positively modern! For the first time, Irene realized the youth of her own country. The proud girl, considering herself on an equality with the greatest Russian families, felt a little humiliated at the thought that the ancestors of her princely hosts once walked about the Forum in togas, took part in the government of ancient Rome and in the creation of a great art and a great literature, and gave their laws to the whole civilized world. She tried to picture to herself the Russia of that time: a wilderness peopled by savage hordes in skins of wild beasts, nomad tribes, wandering through forests and swamps and deserts. . . .

Her dreams were interrupted by the old Prince, who, noticing that she was alone, and prompted by his antique and aristocratic sense of hospitality, approached to entertain her. Irene broached the subject of the legend, and naïvely added that she supposed the chapel and adjoining rooms were only opened for this one day every year.

"No, indeed," answered the Prince with a

smile—"the rooms are in constant use, and our Chaplain holds daily services in the chapel."

Irene felt confused, and at the same time a curious feeling of envy came over her.

"How happy these people are," she thought, to have lived for so many centuries in the same town, in the same house, surrounded by legends and traditions and the shadows of their ancestors! All this is real—they are not masquerading in strange costumes and beliefs and customs, like emigrants of all nationalities, who spend their lives in travelling North, South, East and West, in search of new sensations and impressions. There came to Irene's mind the thought of one of her friends, a girl with a mania for having herself photographed in the national costume of every country she visited. An entire little shelf in Irene's Petrograd drawing-room was covered with frames from which smiled the young girl's round, laughing, purely Slavonic little face, here under the fez of a Crimean Tartar maid, there under a Spanish mantilla, elsewhere in the

guise of a Neapolitan fisher-girl. Had not Irene's own wish to enter a convent also been nothing much more than a desire to dress up in a picturesque costume?

These thoughts reminded her of Père Etienne, and on returning to her *pension*, Irene wrote and asked him to come and see her. She had seen very little of him lately. Père Etienne felt that something had happened to change Irene's ideas during her stay at Assisi—but, however much he questioned her, he could not discover what that something had been. Seeing that she had drifted into social life, he regretfully left off paying her his daily visits. Like all true pastors, he always attached himself to his spiritual children, and was sincerely grieved when the circumstances of life separated him from them. The warm-hearted old man now consoled himself with the thought that he had been mistaken in taking convent life to be Irene's vocation, and that she would be happier if she married her compatriot. In his heart, however, there still lingered an intuition that would not let him believe in

matrimonial happiness for her. No one understands human nature better than a clever priest, who hears countless confessions and looks into the deepest recesses of the countless souls that are laid bare before him.

On receiving Irene's invitation, he went to her immediately, and they spent a charming evening together. The convent in the Via Gallia was not even mentioned. They spoke of Saint Philip of Neri, of his life and his pupils, of miracles and prayer.

The following day Irene awoke in a pious mood, and put off Gzhatski, who had arranged to take her to some local function. Gzhatski, clever strategist that he was, guessed what had happened, and hastened to create a diversion. He disappeared for a time, made mysterious arrangements, and kept mysterious appointments, and after three days, arrived suddenly to inform Irene that Cardinal R—— would receive her in audience at seven o'clock that evening.

"Receive me!" exclaimed Irene in surprise. "But why should I go to him?"

"Why not make the acquaintance of a

Cardinal, once he is kind enough to wish to receive you?" answered Gzhatski. "You have decided to join the Catholic Church, and you ought to know more of its priesthood. Père Etienne alone is insufficient—there are plenty of other enlightened and clever men among the Roman priests—they are by no means all furious fanatics!"

XVI

IRENE had to agree, and punctually at seven o'clock she presented herself at the Cardinal's house. Her conscience reproached her a little for troubling a man so occupied with important affairs, but she had heard so much about this famous Cardinal that curiosity won the day over her scruples.

Cardinal R—— was one of the most distinguished members of the Papal Court. He was nicknamed "le Pape manqué," because at the last election he had received the greatest number of votes. His pronounced French sympathies, however, had, in the eyes of the other Catholic countries, stood in his way, with the result that, in answer to his election, the Austro-Hungarian Ambassador had announced the "veto" of the Austrian Emperor. The amazed Cardinals, though

they had long forgotten this ancient privilege of the Austrian crown, were obliged to submit, and the next candidate was elected Pope. It is a characteristic fact that Pius X. was so annoyed at his election that, on becoming Pope against his will, his first action was to annul for ever the Austrian right of "veto."

Remembering this episode, Irene involuntarily felt a great respect for the man who had had the courage of his opinions and sympathies to the extent of paying for them by losing the Papacy. Such honesty seemed hardly in keeping with the traditional spirit of intrigue and deceit with which the Papal court was supposed to be permeated, and which Irene had so frequently heard discussed in Russia.

The Cardinal lived in a small detached house, within the precincts of the Vatican, and Irene was struck, by no means for the first time, by the resemblance between these Vatican houses and courtyards, and the inner courts and arch-priest's dwellings of Russian monasteries. There was in both the same sense of chill and isolation and lifelessness.

Even the waiting-room into which a slow old servant led Irene was exactly like the room of a Russian monastic priest. The same clumsy wooden furniture upholstered in red velvet, the same religious pictures. The only things that were missing were the typical and inevitable strip of canvas that runs like a pathway right across the floors of all our Russian priestly houses, and the extraordinary variety of worsted cushions, with their wonderful patterns of fantastic animals and flowers, embroidered for our priests by pious Russian parishioners.

A young secretary twice passed through the waiting-room, throwing, each time, a quick but scrutinizing glance at Irene. Finally, unable to restrain himself any longer, he approached her, with a charming smile:

"Voudriez vous me dire, Mademoiselle," he inquired, "le motif pour lequel vous désirez voir Son Eminence?

Irene did not know how to answer. She really could not say that she had come simply to pacify a troublesome friend!

"J'ai entendu parler de la sympathie que

Son Eminence éprouve pour les Russes," she stammered vaguely.

"Oh oui! Oh oui!" said the secretary, nodding his head. "Les sympathies de Son Eminence pour la Russie sont bien connues. Cependant, Mademoiselle, il me semble que vous devez avoir une raison plus . . . plus . . ."

The secretary was evidently at a loss to find the right word. Noticing that he was regarding her enormous muff with interest, Irene remembered that an attempt to assassinate a highly-placed personage, had recently been made in Rome.

"I understand your anxiety," she remarked. "There are visitors who arrive with a bomb in their muffs!" With these words, as though accidentally, she made a movement with her muff, bringing it close to the secretary's eyes. He glanced sharply into it, and was evidently appeased.

"Oh! certes, Son Eminence sera très satisfaite de vous voir, Mademoiselle," he said. "Veuillez attendre quelques instants au salon; Son Eminence ne tardera pas à rentrer."

The waiting-room, in the meantime, was filling with people. An old Monsignor entered, and Irene bowed to him. To her surprise, however, he not only did not reply, but never even glanced in her direction. Another priest entered, and again the same thing happened. Then came three Capuchin monks who made obvious efforts to look at anything but Irene, and sat down at the furthest possible point from her. The proud, sensitive woman felt deeply offended and annoyed.

"Do they take me for a leper?" she thought angrily, "or am I so hideous that it disgusts them to look at me?" Suddenly, however, a humorous idea flashed through her mind. Irene had so long ago left off thinking of herself as in any sense an attractive woman, that the sudden idea of being regarded by anyone in the light of a possible temptation, caused her, quite unexpectedly, to burst into a loud peal of laughter. The monks frowned, and Irene hastened to hide her laughing face in the muff that had so alarmed the young secretary.

At this moment there burst into the room, noisily, and talking in strident tones, two

lean and yellow English old maids with scant greyish hair, and enormous fashionable hats. Chattering fast and animatedly, they sat down exactly opposite the Capuchins, and robbed these victims of the only blank wall at which they could safely gaze without jeopardizing the salvation of their souls.

What were the poor monks to do? The devil evidently had awful designs on them that evening, and terrible temptation peered at them from every corner of the Cardinal's waiting-room. As though by order, they all lowered their eyelids, and remained, as though turned into stone, with their gaze riveted on the floor.

The door opened, and Irene was asked to pass into the Cardinal's presence.

A dimly illuminated ante-room led into the drawing-room. Here, the furniture was a little more comfortable, and there were pictures and flowers. The cardinal stood at his writing-table, not in his red robes, as Irene had expected, but in black with narrow red edgings. A somewhat worn red cardinal's cap lay on the table. The great priest looked

at Irene in silence, and with a questioning expression. She approached, kissed the ring on his left hand, and thanked him for the honour he was conferring on her by receiving her. He smiled, and the man of the world awoke in him. Asking Irene to sit down on a small sofa, he began to question her about Russia, his words revealing a great knowledge of Russian Church matters. He seemed specially interested in a certain small group of Russian priests, who had recently been sent by the Synod to do penance in far-distant monasteries.

"Mais enfin, que veulent-ils? Que demandent-ils? Quel est le but de leur révolte?" asked the Cardinal.

"I think," answered Irene simply, "that they wanted to convoke a council, with the object of reinstating the Patriarchy."

The Cardinal frowned, and a shadow passed over his face. "Totally unnecessary," he muttered somewhat hurriedly. "Totally unnecessary." And he changed the subject, asking Irene what she had seen in Rome, and how she liked the Catacombs.

"I like the Russian catacombs much better," she answered.

"Yes—I know—you mean the Kieff ones. But they date only from the ninth century. Remember," exclaimed the Cardinal rapturously, "that here, in Rome, the earliest Christian martyrs are buried."

Irene asked where the remains of the Apostle Andrew were preserved.

"Andrew?" repeated the Cardinal, stopping to think a moment. "Yes—the head is in the shrine of St. Peter's, and the rest of the remains are distributed among various churches."

"I ask this," explained Irene, in answer to the Cardinal's questioning glance, "because the Apostle Andrew is particularly dear to Russians, having been the first to teach us Christianity."

"Of course—I know! Andrew, the brother of Saint Peter," said the Cardinal with a subtle smile, as though wishing to underline the fact that Rome and Russia had received Christianity from two brothers. "Well, and what churches have you seen in Rome?"

Irene mentioned several of the most famous.

"Have you been to the church of Saint Cecilia?" asked the Cardinal a little uncertainly. "No?"—he was clearly disappointed. "You should go there without fail. It is my church—it has some very interesting subterranean passages."

A tender smile suddenly illuminated the stern features of this old and serious man. Irene afterwards ascertained that Cardinal R. had spent his whole fortune on the restoration and preservation of the church of Saint Cecilia. She went to see this church on the following day. The ancient shrine gleamed with cleanliness and freshness. Small electric lamps burned before the marble statue of Saint Cecilia, and flowers stood before each of her images. Irene visited the underground sepulchre that holds the remains of the Saint, and was charmed with the elegant new chapel, its small, slim columns, and its exquisite mosaics in the Byzantine style. Thus might one decorate and beautify the tomb of a beloved daughter. On entering this chapel

Irene understood the true character of Cardinal R——, and knew that his stern exterior concealed a tender, loving heart, which, in the absence of personal family ties, had ardently attached itself to a poetical shadow, to someone's pure and lovely image, to someone's spotless and sacred memory.

Gzhatski was much pleased with the impression produced upon Irene by Cardinal R——, and announced that she must now make the acquaintance of Monsignor Lefrène, of whom all Rome was talking.

Monsignor Lefrène, a clever and highly intellectual Frenchman, had written a history of the Christian Church. The book had been published, sold, and widely read, when suddenly the Jesuit Fathers, who always play the part of defenders of Catholic purity, announced that Lefrène's history was dangerous to the faithful.

"It contains nothing contrary to Catholic dogmas," they wrote, "but its whole tone and tendency is offensive, and likely to do much harm."

The book was put on the Index, and the

author had to do penance. Needless to say, this excess of zeal on the part of the Jesuit Fathers did much more harm than could ever have been done by poor Monsignor Lefrène. Few people, indeed, took the trouble to read the condemned book ; but everyone talked about it, and the idea became prevalent that Lefrène held the same views as those for which the Orthodox Church had excommunicated Tolstoi, which probability proved that heresies had stolen into the fold of Rome. Believers spoke of Lefrène with horror, and demanded that he should be expelled from the priesthood. Atheists, on the contrary, rubbed their hands in triumph. And all this storm in a teacup had been raised by nothing more serious that Monsignor Lefrène's sense of humour. Minds such as his, indeed, are comparatively rare, and are of true and deep value to society. A witty, well-aimed pleasantry may often point out to us very clearly the absurdity or grotesqueness of some pet idea or enthusiasm, and by so doing may bring us sharply back to reason. Thousands of people owe their

abandonment of some baneful caprice to a chance word of ridicule; yet it is a strange fact that a satirical mind always renders its owner unpopular. The public may perhaps sometimes forgive a satirical writer of short stories, but a satirical priest—never! People will not understand that when Nature endows her children with talent, she cannot foresee what uniform they will wear later on.

Monsignor Lefrène's sparkling epigrams were repeated all over Rome, and cost him, according to rumour, the Cardinal's hat. Not that the witty Monsignor was very anxious for this honour. Truly talented people always value God's gift to them above all earthly honours, and a successful epigram gives as much personal satisfaction to a wit, as a successful novel to a writer. Both, indeed, are on the same level. It is, however, undoubted that popular malice, animosity, and failure to understand or recognize their genius, can deeply wound a talented nature; and it is strange that these carping tongues often distinguish themselves, in their own immediate circles, by delicacy and charity.

Monsignor Lefrène occupied the second floor of one of Rome's most splendid palaces. The magnificent antique ceilings and walls, the beautiful furniture, the wealth of sunlight that filled this luxurious abode, seemed more suited to the tastes of a scientist philosopher than to those of a priest. In a line with the reception-rooms was a covered terrace, full of tropical plants, among which strayed a number of tame pigeons. Irene loved pigeons, and stepped out on the terrace to observe them more closely. It was here that Monsignor Lefrène found her, and greeted her with his always humorous smile, and a quick glance from his keen, intelligent eyes.

"I am admiring your birds, Monsignor," said Irene as they shook hands.

"Are you?" he answered. "But have you seen my Tiber? Look how beautiful it is through this window." And the Monsignor pointed to the yellow muddy waters that always filled Irene with disgust, when comparing it with the clear, blue rivers of Russia.

The conversation turned to the Orthodoxy,

and Lefrène showed himself to be like most Catholic priests, closely acquainted with Russian Church matters. In addition, he had many friends among the higher Russian clergy. Irene purposely began to speak of the suggested Orthodox Church Council, which she had discussed also with Cardinal R——. Monsignor looked displeased.

"But why do you want a council?" he asked.

"Why?" exclaimed Irene. "One of our great writers has said that the Orthodox Church has been paralyzed since the days of Peter the Great. With the election of a patriarch, she may perhaps recover, and pronounce some new word."

Lefrène shook his head.

"Oh! La nouvelle verité ne sortira jamais de l'église," he remarked with conviction.

Irene was amazed.

"I don't understand," she stammered questioningly.

Monsignor smiled. "Comment voulez vous qu'un prêtre émette une idée nouvelle," he said, "quand la coupole de Saint Pierre pése sur des épaules?"

"Yes, but we Russians have no 'Saint Peter's,'" observed Irene quietly.

"Eh bien, vous avez la coupole de Moscou! Dans chaque religion, toujours une coupole quelconque pesera sur le prêtre et lui fermera la bouche"—and a deep sadness trembled in poor Lefrène's voice.

"But even if so," said Irene, "the council might improve the education of our clergy, and teach them to cultivate warmer relations with their flocks." And in her turn she could not restrain the note of personal sorrow and regret that echoed in her words.

"Oh, I have heard all those complaints before, especially from your late philosopher, Vladimir Solovyof," replied Monsignor. "He once related me a very characteristic legend in this connection," and, with his subtle smile, Lefrène repeated the legend of Saint Nicholas, supposed to be of Russian origin.

Saint Nicholas, accompanied by the Reverend Cassian, once came down from heaven, on a visit to earth. On the great highway they met a poor peasant, the wheels

of whose cart had become embedded in the mud of the roadside, and he was vainly exerting himself almost beyond his strength to extricate them.

"Let us help him," said the charitable Saint Nicholas.

"No, that is impossible," replied the Reverend Cassian scornfully. "We should soil our white robes."

But Saint Nicholas paid no attention to him, and set to work to help the peasant. Both horse and cart were soon standing safely in the dry roadway, but several splashes of mud had stained the snowy whiteness of the Saint's raiment.

When God heard of this occurrence, He ordered that from thenceforward the memory of Saint Nicholas was to be honoured twice a year, but that of the Rev. Cassian only once in four years. (The festival of Saint Cassian falls on the 29th of February!)

"Vladimir Solovyof," added Monsignor Lefrène, "told me this legend in that half-mocking tone which is nearly always assumed by Frenchmen when speaking of *le bon Dieu*,

but which, in Russian, is quite inadmissible. He explained the legend as follows: Saint Nicholas represents the Catholic Church, always warmly attached and interested in its followers and never afraid of touching dirt when there is a chance of saving a sinner. Cassian, on the other hand, is the Orthodox Church, cold and haughty, indifferent to her people, and only anxious to retain her outer immaculacy.

Irene was greatly drawn to Monsignor Lefrène and with her usual impulsiveness, feeling a profound confidence in him, she made him a confession of her own personal credo, that same credo that Père Etienne had once waved away with a smile. Lefrène listened with his customary half-satirical smile, and answered quietly:

"Your faith has nothing whatever in common with Christianity. If anything it is Biblical, of the Old Testament. We Christians abandoned all such ideas nineteen centuries ago."

Irene blushed. "It is as if they had talked it over between them," she thought. "Père

Etienne said my faith suited the Samoyedes, and this man says it is of the Old Testament."

"True Christians," explained Lefrène, noticing Irene's perplexity, "never expect rewards or justice in this world, because they realize that such results are only possible beyond the grave. To pagans and Old Testament Jews, the idea of a future life had not presented itself—hence, in the book of Job, for instance, Job, having patiently borne all his sufferings, expects God, in justice, to cure him of his leprosy, give him new wealth, new children, a new wife. No, for that matter, he kept his old, former wife, and this very circumstance makes me think that Job was not nearly as happy as the Bible would have us believe."

The same evening, telling Gzhatski about her visit to Lefrène, Irene mentioned the shade of displeasure that had crossed the face of the Monsignor, and similarly, a few days previously, that of Cardinal R——, at the mention of the suggested Orthodox Council.

"I am not at all surprised," replied Gzhatski. "The Catholics know very well that a body

without a head must, sooner or latter, decay and fall to pieces. They foresee the moment when Russia, to save her religion, will have to choose a head for her Church, and they hope to be able, at that moment, to persuade her to accept the Pope as this head. The election of a Patriarch would be a great blow to their designs, and would indefinitely postpone all idea of a union between the two churches. I say *postpone* because all Catholics are completely convinced that ultimately this union must come to pass."

"That is exactly what I cannot understand," exclaimed Irene. "The longer I live in Rome, the more I come to the conclusion that the two churches have really never been separated. No one but theologians is interested in dogmas. Ordinary mortals, orthodox and Catholic alike, believe in the same legends and superstitions, the same saints and martyrs, the same prayers, the same gospel, the same services. It is even astonishing that two churches, having so long ago severed all connection with each other, should have remained so astonishingly similar. Russian pilgrims,

who go to Bari to pray at the shrine of Saint Nicholas, the worker of miracles, proceed from there to the shrines of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in Rome, where they feel perfectly at home. What is the use of worrying about the re-union of two churches that actually have never been disunited at all?"

"You forget the political standpoint," said Gzhatski. "Russia is growing daily and hourly, and with each year her might increases. Some day, in the not too far-distant future, her support may be of enormous importance to the Pope. What with the spread of Atheism and Freemasonry, there is nothing to ensure that the Vatican will not one fine day suddenly be turned into a National museum, and some out-of-the-way monastery in the Apennines be offered to the Pope as a residence! The Catholic nations of Europe would, in such a case, probably limit themselves, as they did on the occasion of the taking of Rome, to the sending of deputations and expressions of sympathy. It is at that moment that the Pope, like King Lear, will turn away from his proud

elder daughters Regan and Goneril, on whom he has lavished so much love and care, and will remember the far-away Cordelia, whom, though she has received nothing from him, he has never ceased to regard as his daughter. There is no doubt that the Vatican has some hopes in connection with the Northern Cordelia, and—who knows?—perhaps even these hopes are not quite without foundation. In any case, a persecuted and friendless Pope would certainly appeal far more strongly to the sympathies of the Russian people than the present magnificent and triumphant Pontiff!"

XVII

THE Catholic and the Orthodox Easter fell that year on the same date. It was already Passion Week, and for some days Irene saw nothing of Gzhatski. He was preparing for Easter Communion, and went every day to the Russian Church. Irene, on her side, was anxious not to miss even the least of the Catholic services and ceremonies. A spell of cold, windy weather had broken in upon the sunny springtime, and, perhaps on this account, perhaps also through the fatigue of constant long standing in church (there are no chairs in the great Roman cathedrals), Irene's nerves were in an unbearable state of tension and restlessness. With a great effort, she turned her steps, on the Thursday evening, towards St. Peter's, where the annual ceremony of the washing of the altar was to take place.

The immense church was filled from end to end with a dense, closely-packed crowd, the service being, however, audible only to the comparatively few who stood near the altar. For that matter, there really was not any service at all. A Cardinal sat on the central throne, and grouped around him on wooden seats and stools were the numerous grades and members of the Vatican State Clergy. They were singing in low, dull, monotonous tones, and their endless, wail-like, doleful chant produced a most disagreeable impression on the nerves. The tired, enervated crowd pressed against the wooden barriers that enclosed a free passage for the procession. Everyone felt hot and tired and hungry, and faint from the close, stuffy atmosphere. Cross Englishwomen were quarrelling with neighbouring Italian women, and pushing them unceremoniously. In perfectly audible tones they repeatedly remarked the impoliteness of people in Rome, especially at St. Peter's on that particular occasion. Scarcely anybody was praying, the majority of those present having

come simply to witness an interesting spectacle. Pretty young American girls were there with their sweethearts, and were undisguisedly amusing themselves, chattering and laughing and coquetting. At last, after three hours of responses and lamentations and misereres, the long-awaited procession appeared. In front came young attendants in lace aprons, and behind them fat old priests, looking like old women, with their smooth, round faces, their ample mauve robes, and their mauve-lined, grey, squirrel capes. Each one carried in his hand a rod with a sponge attached to it. Last of all, also carrying an enormous sponge, came a Cardinal in a red robe with a long train carried by an attendant.

The procession mounted the altar steps, and, all coverings and ornaments having been previously removed, began to wash the altar. A scent of wine spread through the church. Having concluded this ceremony, the procession passed slowly and solemnly round the altar to the accompaniment of a shower of rattles, sounded to

denote the dismay and perturbation of all Nature—the thunder and earthquake that followed Christ's death.

Irene followed everything with great attention. A strange, new feeling of contempt seemed to tremble in her soul. At home, in her own country, she had always come away from the Passion Week sèrvices deeply touched, and in great emotion. And now, all these unaccustomed ceremonies and costumes and rites, the strange language, the extraordinary pagan ritual, suddenly shocked her. Maybe she was overtired from three hours' standing in the crowd, and, therefore, more than usually critical—but true it is that she contemplated almost with loathing the whole scene before her, even the marble columns and the colossal statues of the great Roman Cathedral.

"And they call this Christianity!" she thought bitterly. "What an irony! This is sheer paganism, and these are the same ancient Romans, still worshipping the same old gods as before. They have never understood Christ's teaching, and they have buried

it under marble shrines and pagan ceremonies.

"In your place I would go a little further still," exclaimed Irene's inner soul with malicious sarcasm. "I would destroy every New Testament in the world, except one—and that one I would put in a golden, jewel-studded box, and would bury it deep in the earth, forbidding its disinterment on pain of death. Over it, I would build a splendid golden shrine, and in this shrine I would celebrate night and day magnificent services with gorgeous processions. That would be entirely in accordance with the spirit of your Christianity.

"But you have not the temerity to go so far. You vaguely feel that some day the world will arise in fury against you, will destroy your temples, tear into shreds your splendid robes, and leave, alone and triumphant, only the Gospel, the one Christian teaching humanity needs. And then, there will come together 'two or three in His Name,' to read His Book and to pray—and 'He will be among them.'"

Thus, angrily, yet dreaming, Irene's thoughts flew. Just in front of her stood an Italian middle-class couple. The young husband held a three-year-old girl by the hand while the pretty mother pressed to her heart a white bundle, evidently a sleeping infant. The noise of the rattles must have disturbed its slumbers, for suddenly the bundle stirred, a tiny hand stretched itself forth in search of the mother's breast, and a low wail made itself heard. The mother immediately sat down at the foot of a marble column, and began to feed the child. For some reason, the idea occurred to Irene that in all that pagan crowd in a pagan temple the only representatives of Christianity were that simple mother and child.

"There is the great miracle!" she thought rapturously. "New life, coming no one knows from where! Why are you all quarrelling about whether certain miracles were or were not performed nineteen centuries ago in Palestine? Why must you be certain of those particular miracles, before you can believe in God? To-day, at this

very moment, you are surrounded by miracles. Birth, death, sunrise, springtime, winter—are not all these miracles? You have forgotten them because you see them every day. In your silly self-conceit, you assure yourselves that all this is perfectly natural, and that science has long ago explained it all—but you forget that your science has only *noted* the existence of these miracles, and that their secret belongs as much as ever to the Almighty Ruler of the Universe in whom you find it so difficult to believe."

Irene left the Cathedral in great moral perturbation. So great was her excitement that she forgot to take a cab, and walked all the long way home, in the face of a cutting east wind that she did not even notice. Large tears ran down her face, she talked to herself, gesticulated, and drew the attention of all passers-by. The pagan soul that had passed Christianity by was sobbing and storming within her. For one moment, under the influence of the very ceremonies she was execrating, she had understood how priceless was the treasure she had lost. Life

might have been beautiful and full of harmony, whereas, on the path she had chosen, there was nothing but constant, needless, helpless suffering. Someone should have taught her Christianity! Her soul had been confided to someone's care, and that someone had not fulfilled his sacred duty!

And Irene, in her despair, cursed all lazy and idle slaves, for a voice in her soul told her that her fate was sealed, and that it was too late to try and change it.

XVIII

The following morning Irene awoke feeling depressed and miserable. She was afraid to remain alone with her own thoughts, and wrote to Gzhatski, asking him to come and take her for a drive on the Appian Way. It was Good Friday, and Gzhatski was just on the point of leaving his hotel to go to the Russian Church, when Irene's letter was handed to him. He guessed from the tone of her words that something unusual was the matter with his friend, and, without hesitating, he immediately drove off to fetch her. Asking no questions, and pretending not to notice her tear-stained eyes and trembling lips, he sat quietly beside her, as the cab rolled past the Colosseum and the Baths of Caracalla, to the Porta San Sebastiano. It was a grey, dull morning. The yellow, thick,

Roman dust had been laid by the recent rain, the wind had fallen, and not a leaf stirred on the trees. On either side of the Via Appia Antica rose high stone walls, obstructing the view over the Campagna. At last, however, they passed the tomb of Cecilia Metella, and drove out into the open country. Before them stretched the narrow ancient road, in places still paved with flat stones, in the ancient fashion. This road, straight as an arrow, stretches all the way to Albano, making no zig-zags even when climbing up-hill. It is a road that could only have been made by children, or by ancient Romans! On either side of the way stand monuments of the most varied forms, round, cone-shaped, pyramidal, and other varieties, difficult to name or describe. Some of them still boast bas-reliefs and inscriptions, and here and there fallen statues, armless or headless, peep out between the bushes. Occasionally, too, some stray monument is surrounded by a frame of tall cypresses and Roman pines, but in general, there is not much greenery, except the tall, fresh grass, full of mauve and yellow

field-flowers, and scarlet poppies. In the far distance are the blue Albanian hills, and on the left the graceful ruins of the Aqueducts stand out in charming relief against the sky.

Irene gazed in silence at the lovely picture. It was long since she had ventured beyond the stone walls of the city, and now, at sight of Nature in this fresh spring dress, a new, strange, unconquerable desire for happiness suddenly took possession of her soul.

"It is inhuman to be always miserable and in tears, and to eternally curse one's own existence," she thought; "everyone has a right to at least occasional gleams of happiness. Who has dared to condemn me to constant despair? I claim my share of joy! I claim it! I demand it! I desire it!"

Irene repeated the words passionately to herself, and it seemed to her that Fate must send her happiness, if only because she desired it so ardently.

"I cannot wait any longer!" she seemed to be inwardly exclaiming to somebody. "I must have happiness immediately—to-day!

Yes, to-day, to-day—I do not believe in to-morrow!"

Gzhatski, too, was silent, and apparently lost in his own thoughts, as he sat back in the carriage, smiling softly to himself.

"How lovely!" he suddenly exclaimed, turning to Irene. "Don't you think the Campagna reminds one of the country in Russia? The same limitless space, the same meadows, even the same modest spring, not at all southern and luxurious. I hardly think Nature at my place in the S—— province can be much more than a month behind this."

Presently they alighted, and climbed up a little grassy slope to admire the view, the loveliness of which was enhanced by the wonderful silence in which all Nature seemed wrapt. No sound was heard, except the occasional shy note of a bird, and the low baa-ing of distant sheep.

On the way back they stopped to have tea at the Castello dei Cesari, an original and charming little restaurant, arranged in an ancient tower. They sat near the window of the large hall, with its wooden ceiling,

brick floor, antique wooden chandeliers, and enormous antique vases full of flowers.

The magnificent view embraced the Palatine Hill, with its gigantic ruins, and towards evening the setting sun threw the magic of its golden glory alike over the ruins and the lilacs and fruit-trees that bloomed among them.

Was it the springtime, or a likeness between the Campagna and his home that had touched Gzhatski? He suddenly began to speak of his mother, of that holy of holies in his soul that he always kept so jealously to himself. Leaning his elbows on the table, he spoke to Irene of his childhood, his home, his most cherished recollections, and his life with the beloved, sainted guardian of his early days.

"How she loved me! How proud she was of me! With what tenderness she looked at me! She brought me up with nothing but love. When governesses or tutors made some complaint about me, she called me to her, repeated their words, and said: 'I cannot believe it possible that you should have done such a thing. There must be some

misunderstanding. Explain it to me.' And I was afraid to be naughty, because it was awful to give her pain and to meet her sad, reproachful glance. I was still quite little, but I already realized that life had not brought her much happiness. Besides, the circumstances were such that I naturally reasoned and reflected much more than most children of my age. My father used to come once or twice a year; my mother was always bedridden. The whole household was accustomed to apply to me for orders, and I very early assumed the responsibilities of the master of the house. I remember even that when I was barely twelve, I began to take up a protecting attitude towards my mother! She was more amused than displeased, and told me that she greatly valued such a strong and energetic protector."

Gzhatski stopped for a moment, and his face assumed a hard expression that Irene had never seen there before.

"She died suddenly," he continued, lowering his voice. "Three hours before her death, I came to show myself to her in a new

riding-suit that had just arrived from Petrograd. She asked to be raised on her cushions that she might see me better, and she looked at me delightedly. I thought myself magnificent, posed, glanced at myself in the glass, and played with my elegant riding-whip. What a child I was at seventeen! I smile to think of it. The new suit was the reason of my taking a longer ride than usual that day, and the groom who was sent to find me could not catch me up. I returned gaily, trotted up to the entrance, jumped from my horse, and then suddenly saw the tear-stained face of our old butler.

"'Her Excellency is dying,' he whispered.

"As though in a fog, I passed into my mother's room, and started back in fright, seeing her lying on the floor. There is a superstition prevalent in our province to the effect that it is bad to die in bed, and that, at the approach of the agony, the dying must be laid on the floor—*i.e.*, as near as possible to the ground. I have no idea whether my mother really knew of this superstition, but her old and trusted maid afterwards told me

that she had suddenly expressed a wish to be laid on the floor. The wish had been complied with, the maids hurriedly arranging rugs and cushions for the purpose.

"The agony had already begun when I fell on my knees beside my mother. Twice she spoke my name, but she no longer recognized me. She muttered something, stirring restlessly on her pillow. I bent over her, and caught the words:

"'Life—life—how cruel it is! Nothing but tears and sorrow and despair! Not a moment of happiness! Not a moment of joy. . . .'

"I shuddered at these words. So these were my mother's hidden thoughts! The whisper grew still lower, and then ceased. . . . We all waited and listened, and suddenly we knew that she had ceased to be. Someone burst into tears. They lifted her from the floor, and her thin, wasted body took a strange attitude, as it lay heavily and awkwardly in the arms of the maids. At that moment I realized that she was no longer a being, but a *thing;* and, with a cry of horror, I fled. I

shut myself up in my room, and sobbed all the evening, as much with grief at having lost her as with the sharp pain her last words had caused me.

"'She had assured me that I was her life and her joy,' I thought, 'and yet for how little had I counted in her existence.'

"During all our life together, during all those years that had been so dear to me, she had only suffered and hidden her pain from me! 'Never a moment of happiness!' Those last words rang in my ears with cruel and horrible insistence.

"It was already night when I ventured out of my room. The whole household was sleeping; only the deacon was reading the psalms for the dead, in a melancholy voice, beside my mother's body. She lay there, all in white, surrounded with flowers. I approached on tiptoe, and stood still, gazing at her; she looked so small, so thin, so frail, like an old child. A feeling of boundless pity took possession of my soul. 'How, oh how had she deserved so sad a destiny?' I asked myself hopelessly. 'What

had she done? How had she offended God?'

"And I pressed close to her and kissed her, and felt that I had never understood how much she loved me. Only a love that knew no limits could have given her the strength to hide her pain so completely. She had not wanted to sadden my childhood; she had realized that a child could only grow up and develop well and normally when surrounded by love and happiness. How many mothers have I met since who have failed to realize this, and who have ruined the futures of their children by letting them share, at a tender age, tears and sorrows beyond their years!

"I remained beside my mother till dawn; and during that night, it was as if some voice had told me that I should never again have a true friend. The prophecy has indeed been fulfilled; I know the entire province, but I have not a friend. Sometimes, too, I have flattered myself with the hope that I had found a true woman with whom I would like to share my life; but always, as I came within

reach of the prize, it melted away, having been but a dream. Fate always seemed to say to me: 'You have had your fair share of woman's love, and have no right for more.'

"This very winter again, it at one time seemed to me, Irene Pavlovna, that I had found in you a true friend; but I am afraid you are too much occupied with your own salvation to sacrifice any time or thought to friendship. And yet if anything in the world can save you, it is not a convent and not Catholicism, but simply an active interest in your fellow-creatures. When experience and observation have taught us love and charity, we are saved, and life is no longer terrible. Fate may be as cruel as she pleases; but if we have warmth and love in our hearts, we shall never be alone, never in despair, and shall never think of self-destruction, if only out of pity for all our suffering brothers, whom, as long as we live, we have always the chance of helping.

"If only you could rid yourself of the idea that you are too old for marriage! For what precisely is it that you think yourself too old?

For kisses? It is extraordinary that women never seem to see anything beyond the mere physical side of marriage! Look at it from a higher, purer, more Christian standpoint! Believe me, what men need most is sympathy, friendship, understanding, and the generous, noble love that can forgive us our faults and our shortcomings. I have contemplated your state of mind from every standpoint, and sometimes I wonder whether the sickness of my own soul is not even more dangerous and incurable than yours. I only cannot myself see it so plainly, or rather I do not attach to it the importance it deserves. . . ."

Irene became engaged to Gzhatski, and he persuaded her to leave Rome as quickly as possible, and go to the Riviera, whither his doctors were sending him, in fear of Roman springtime malaria. To tell the truth, Gzhatski was far less afraid of malaria than of Père Etienne, the strength of whose influence over Irene he greatly exaggerated. Natures like Irene's never remain long under the same influence. They are swayed by sudden enthusiasms and equally sudden dis-

appointments. Blown to right and to left by every passing breeze, they fling themselves into one friendship and then another, searching for happiness everywhere, and finding it nowhere. The hour of Catholicism in the person of Père Etienne had struck and passed, and there had dawned the new dream of salvation through love.

Irene agreed to go with Gzhatski to Monte Carlo. The day and hour of departure were already fixed; but she still had not the courage to inform Père Etienne of her new plans. She tried several times to write to him, but always ended by tearing her lengthy explanations in despair. At last, on the very morning of the great day, an hour before her departure, she sent him a note, informing him of her unexpected decision to leave immediately for the Riviera, and promising to write at greater length from there.

Irene had proposed to meet Gzhatski at the station; but he had obstinately insisted on coming to fetch her, and she had been obliged to give in. Her acquaintances at the *pension* said good-bye to her very coldly;

they could not forgive her for her treachery to the cause of their beloved Catholicism. Some of them regarded her with contempt, others with envy.

Gzhatski's cab stood at the door, and Irene was already seated in it, impatiently longing to start. The servants were tying on the luggage, Gzhatski was standing on the pavement, smoking and giving occasional directions, and at the windows of the *pension* interested faces could be seen peeping through the curtains. At this moment Père Etienne, puffing and panting in hot haste, appeared round the corner. The kind old man had just received Irene's note, and had come to say good-bye, and to bless her before her departure. Catching sight of Gzhatski he stopped still for a moment, completely dumbfounded, while Gzhatski smiled in undisguised triumph. The old man was angry. His face assumed a cold and proud expression, and taking no notice whatever of Irene he turned to the entrance of the *pension*. Having, however, already reached the door, he suddenly, in spite of

himself, looked round. Irene was gazing at him with such a confused, guilty air, that Père Etienne's severity involuntarily relaxed, and he bowed sadly. "Poor girl!" his kind, sympathetic old face seemed to say—"you have thrown away your last chance of happiness!"

XIX

A BRILLIANT spring was reigning in Monte Carlo. Not the pale, cold, Russian spring, when in May the first shy snowdrops barely manage to force their white heads through the ground; nor yet the Roman spring, that Gzhatski called "modest," but the real, passionate, southern precursor of summer. April was not yet over, but the weather was hot as at midsummer. The blue sea sparkled dazzlingly under the unbearably strong rays of the sun, flowers hung like thick carpets over walls and terraces, gorgeous roses climbed over the trellises and fences of the gardens. And no one was there to admire all this splendour—for the season was over, the hotels and shops were closed, the shutters of the villas were up, and Monte Carlo resembled the kingdom of the "Sleeping

Beauty." All the life that was still there was concentrated in the neighbourhood of the gaming rooms, and it was here that Irene and Gzhatski spent their days, walking in the lovely Casino gardens, or sitting on the fairy-like terrace overlooking the sea.

They had intended to be married immediately on their arrival in Monte Carlo, but, as is always the case with Russians, it had turned out that the ceremony could only take place on the production of countless official papers that had to be sent for to Russia. In the meantime, they had settled in a large hotel close to the Casino—the only hotel open all the year round—and happy in each other's society, they revelled in the glories of the golden springtime that fashionable Riviera visitors had so foolishly abandoned.

Monte Carlo produced a very curious impression on Irene. In Rome she had seen, side by side with palaces, splendid carriages, and dazzling luxury, the most heart-rending poverty and beggary—a contrast to be met with in all large cities. Here, on the contrary, there was nothing of the kind. It seemed

as if every inhabitant of this sunlit fairyland lived and existed merely for his own pleasure. The very waiters at the Café de Paris hummed and danced to the sound of the Hungarian orchestra as they served visitors with refreshments. The Arab pedlars, selling Eastern shawls, wandered through the gardens in their white *burnous* and their smart red boots, apparently more intent upon boasting of the beauty of their wares than upon selling them. The only busy people in the whole place seemed to be the croupiers, and when, at given hours, groups of them came out of the Casino to be replaced by new relays, they reminded one of workmen leaving a factory after an exhausting day's work.

The remaining inhabitants did nothing from morning till night but walk about in elegant summer clothes, feed pigeons, drink tea to the accompaniment of music, play with their absurd little dogs, or gamble in the Casino.

Irene was much interested in this, to her, novel type of public, and was particularly astonished at the sight of so many middle-

aged, even old, women, with dyed hair, made-up faces, girlish dresses and hats, tripping gracefully along, and smiling coquettishly at their funny little old-men admirers. The latter, even if somewhat shaky on their legs, also wore light, fashionable clothes, and flowers in their buttonholes. At first they made Irene laugh, but soon, with the inconsistency of nearly all weak characters, she began to wonder whether it was not much wiser to cling to one's youth than to be old at thirty, as was her own case. The conviction that this was indeed so came upon her suddenly, and she immediately rushed off to Nice, and ordered a whole mountain of elegant dresses, hats, false curls, etc. Having previously considered it a sin to spend an extra penny on clothes, Irene now went from shop to shop, never even attempting to bargain, and throwing money about with almost feverish prodigality in her desire to possess herself without delay of all that was most elegant and luxurious in the way of frocks and frills.

Gzhatski observed her in amazed silence,

and smilingly watched the transformation of yesterday's nun, with her flat hair and her eternal black dress, into a coloured fashion-plate. Being, in his heart, far more pleased than otherwise that his future wife should be well dressed and elegant, he did not protest. What disquieted him much more, indeed, was a passion that Irene suddenly developed for gambling. Gzhatski, having himself once advised her to cultivate some passion, if only artificially, just that it might attach her more firmly to earth, very ruefully contemplated the development of this passion now that it had shown itself without any effort on Irene's part! Sergei Grigorievitch, indeed, was one of those men who, in the woman they have chosen, admit only one possible passion: that of love for themselves!

It was anything but easy to dissuade Irene from gambling. She revelled in the sensations of those feverish minutes passed at the tables, falling into the depths of despair at the loss of fifty francs, and soaring into an absolute frenzy of delight at the gain of forty! On leaving the gambling rooms,

Irene took deep breaths of the fresh sea air, her eyes shone, and it seemed to her that the sea and the hills and the flowers had never been so beautiful before. It was this that displeased Gzhatski. He might have reconciled himself to the idea of her gambling had she regretted her losses, but he could not forgive her that feverish delight, that moral ecstacy and satisfaction that she gleaned from this new craze.

Sometimes he succeeded in luring her away from the temptations of the tables by arranging excursions in the neighbourhood. Like most Slavs, indeed like most sons of a young race, Gzhatski could not grow old, and at forty, he often laughed and played pranks like a schoolboy. He had the capacity, indeed, of infecting everyone around him with his gaiety, even cab-drivers, boatmen, and waiters! To each and all of them he knew how to say the right word, or make the right joke, at the right moment. He was descended indeed from a noble old race of landowners, who had always been ready to till their own soil, side by side with their peasants, seeing

in the latter, not machines, but interesting and deserving human beings.

To Irene, such simple relations with the lower classes seemed strangely new and original. In the usual Petrograd fashion, she had hardly ever exchanged a word with her servants, and barely knew them by sight. At hotels at which she had stayed for two months she had nearly always, on leaving, been obliged, before giving a tip, to ask the manager which waiter had served her all the time, she herself being quite unable to distinguish him from the others.

In every way, indeed, Gzhatski proved a most interesting travelling companion. Men always bring gaiety and animation into the lives of lonely women, even when they are neither lovers nor husbands, but simply distant relations. This is so, because women who have no social activities to distract their thoughts are inclined to look upon life as something tragic and fatal, against which it is useless to struggle. Men, on the other hand, who, if only indirectly, make our laws and govern our countries, do not attach much

importance to life, often indeed regarding it from the humorous standpoint. It is popularly supposed that men are more conservative than women, and that they care more about traditions and old customs. Actually, however, the laws and customs they passionately defend are invariably useful at the moment, and when the need for them passes, men are the first to abandon them. Women, on the contrary, cling desperately to traditions, especially inconvenient and troublesome ones, and if ever they decide to defy even some unimportant social law, they do it tragically, as though flinging themselves into an abyss.

"There! I have cut off my hair, and I smoke," thinks a newly-converted Nihilist. "The thing is done—there is no turning back. Whatever I may do now, nothing can win me back my old position, and the respect of my fellows. And so—vogue le galère!"

How many perfectly modest women having once let their hairdressers persuade them to dye their hair auburn, immediately assume the

manners and conversational style of "cocottes!"

The southern spring, the music, the excitement of gambling, the constant society of a charming man, all this did not fail to make its due impression on Irene, with the result that she fell, day by day, more and more deeply in love with Gzhatski. In her past dreams of love she had always seen herself hotly disputing with her lover, proclaiming her views and theories like a prophetess, and bringing him round unreservedly to her opinions on all matters. To her own astonishment, however, she now no longer cared in the least about any of her old theories and ideas, and was ready to give them all up without a sigh, to please Gzhatski. She had long ago left off being particular about *what* he said to her, her attention being entirely riveted on the way he said it, on his every movement, smile, or change of expression. Alone in her room in the evening she sat up late, and could not sleep at night, for thinking of his elegant figure, the gleam of his even white teeth, the picturesque manner in which he smoked his

cigarette, etc. The blood rushed to her head, her heart beat loudly, she breathed quickly. Père Etienne had been right in suspecting that an ardent temperament lay concealed under her cold exterior. It is probable, indeed, that Irene was one of the many "chaste sensualists" who abound in society. It is strange that these unconsciously voluptuous natures, suffering as they do very extremely through the virtuous life imposed on them by circumstances, always attribute their sufferings to some lofty ethical reason, such as loss of faith in God, disappointment in their friends, misunderstood ideals, etc., and would in every case be deeply offended should anyone dare to suggest to them a very simple and prosaic cure for their "noble sorrow." They usually guard their virtue very jealously, vaguely feeling that if once passion gains the upper hand over them, they will be her slaves for life.

XX

It was a close, misty day. The hills and the sea were shrouded in a silvery veil, the air was sultry, not a leaf stirred in the trees.

Directly after lunch Gzhatski had accompanied Irene to Nice, where she was to try on her "forty-third dress, and her seventy-fourth hat," as he gaily remarked. At five o'clock, tired after a busy afternoon's shopping, they went to the Jetée-Promenade, for tea.

The season being at its very last ebb, the orchestra was playing in the large hall for the sole benefit of two old women, who slept peacefully in the stalls, and the luxurious empty rooms reminded one of the Sahara Desert on a sultry summer day. The solitary waiter, overjoyed to see two visitors,

hastened to offer them the best table beside the window, where they could enjoy an uninterrupted view over the magnificent Quai des Anglais, with its gorgeous hotels, its palm-trees, and its gay public that seemed suddenly to have dropped from the clouds. The waves were splashing lazily on the shore, numerous half-nude children were paddling in the clear blue water, and a faint, fresh sea-breeze came in at the open window, surrounding Gzhatski and Irene with its caresses.

The sudden sound of noisy footsteps reverberating through the empty rooms caused them both to turn round. The intruder was a tall, handsome "brunette," in a white costume and an enormous hat, elegantly poised on a luxurious mass of hair. A Southern beauty, this, in the full bloom of her charms, the paint on her face serving more as a sign-post than an ornament, for she would undoubtedly have been more attractive without it. Carrying herself with the imperious ease of a woman accustomed to attract universal attention, she sank carelessly into a wicker arm-chair, crossed her legs, and without so much as

glancing at the waiter, ordered a whisky and soda.

"So that is the kind of divinity that grows on the trees here," said Gzhatski, scrutinizing the newcomer attentively. "And I had already decided that Nice was as empty as an Arabian desert."

"She does not live in Nice," answered Irene. "She is staying at our hotel in Monte Carlo."

"How do you know?" said Gzhatski in surprise.

"I happened to be on the balcony last night when the hotel omnibus brought her from the station. I remember noticing the size of her hat-box—now it does not surprise me any more!"

Gzhatski frowned. "I should never have thought a respectable hotel like ours would admit such 'ladies,'" he muttered crossly.

"Well, well—it does not concern us," said Irene, amused at his annoyance.

"Indeed it does," exclaimed Gzhatski. "Nobody could like the idea of such a creature as that living under the same roof and coming

constantly under the eyes of his bride—of the woman who is dearer to him and whom he places higher than all else on earth."

"Dear, dear! What old-fashioned prejudices!" smiled Irene. "I assure you the lady will not demoralize me. On the contrary, I pity her profoundly for having to lead such a frightful life. How do I know? Perhaps if my parents had not left me a fortune I might have been reduced to adopting the same profession!"

"Irene!" cried Gzhatski excitedly, "never dare to say such a thing again! The insult of the suggestion is insufferable. You would have starved rather than lead a life of shame. As if I did not know you! All the pity that is wasted on fallen women is a foolish and unjustifiable pity. There is so much work to be done in the world that everyone who really tries can earn an honest living. These worthless creatures never want to work at all—they care for nothing but a lazy, com fortable, luxurious life."

Gzhatski had become flushed and excited. The unknown beauty turned round and

listened with interest to this "quarrel" in a strange language. The waiter put before her a bottle of soda-water and a small glass of whisky, and went away. She swallowed the whisky in one draught, and took out an elegant gold cigarette case. Holding a cigarette between her teeth she scanned the table for matches. Finding none, she rose, and, as calmly as if approaching an acquaintance, crossed over to Gzhatski and asked him for a light.

Gzhatski looked as black as thunder.

Most ungraciously, he handed the matches to the unknown one, and paying no attention whatever to her "merci monsieur"—pronounced with the sweetest of smiles—he hastened to take Irene away from the Casino.

"The devil!" ejaculated Gzhatski furiously, as they emerged on to the promenade. "It is positively incredible, what they have been allowed to come to, here on the Riviera. The impudence of the hussy! The shamelessness! She sees that I am with a respectable lady, and she dares!" His indignation almost suffocated him.

"Well, well!" said Irene quietly, "why should you expect knowledge of the world and its ways from these unfortunates? Perhaps only yesterday she was washing linen in a laundry; where should she have learnt manners?"

"She should know her place, and not forget herself," growled Gzhatski. "But don't let us speak of it any more. To-morrow morning I shall complain to the manager of the hotel, and if he really insists on turning his place into a bad house we shall have to find rooms elsewhere."

In the evening they went, as usual, to the gambling-rooms. There were very few people, and it was easy to get seats at the tables. Irene sat down beside the croupier, who smiled amiably as to a familiar, frequent visitor. She began to play eagerly, but luck did not come her way that evening, and she soon lost all she had with her. Raising her eyes to Gzhatski, who always made a point on these occasions of standing opposite her and looking at her reproachfully and disapprovingly, she saw, standing next to him, the

daring lady of the recent incident in Nice. She had changed her attire, and wore a magnificent black evening dress, a mauve cloak, and an enormous hat with feathers. Diamonds trembled in her ears, and a row of priceless pearls encircled her neck. In the evening the paint on her face was less noticeable, and she was really so handsome that Irene gazed at her in undisguised admiration.

Gzhatski, though he was standing next to the woman who had so recently infuriated him, did not see her, his attention being riveted on a very original gambler, who was sitting at the end of the table. This was a wrinkled little old man, with a face as yellow as parchment. Before him, on the table, lay a pile of gold, which he was staking to right and to left, without any sort of system, apparently simply putting the coins in the spaces most easily accessible to his rheumatic hands. Strangely enough he nearly always won, and other players began to put their stakes on his numbers.

Feeling Irene's glance upon him, Gzhatski smiled at her tenderly; but noticing that she

was actually looking not at him, but at someone beside him, he turned his head, and his eyes met those of the unknown beauty. Gzhatski flushed, frowned, and turned away from the table. Irene rose, and they both left the gaming-room, and descended into the gardens. Having taken a few steps towards the hotel, Gzhatski suddenly stopped short and exclaimed:

"What a pity to go and shut ourselves up in that horrid hotel. It is only eleven o'clock. Let us go and have supper somewhere."

Irene looked at Gzhatski in astonishment. Only the previous day he had been loud in his praises of the hotel, of its comfort and its beautiful views, and its proximity to the park. Why did he suddenly find it horrid? However, having accustomed herself never to contradict him, Irene made no objection, and they turned to the Café de Paris.

The sound of fashionable valses and familiar operatic melodies floated across the still air from the brilliantly illuminated covered terrace. Quite a number of people sat at the little round tables, the usual heterogeneous

Monte Carlo crowd. There were correct Englishmen in smoking-jackets; there were Germans who had missed their last train back to Menton, and were having supper in company with their fat wives, the latter dressed in hideous canary-coloured blouses, their hats all askew. There were also pretty and theatrically "done-up" young ladies in full evening dress, coming in with an air of boredom, throwing off their wraps with studied negligence, and indifferently perusing the menu. These were professional gamblers, of whom the French say, "qu'elles ne sont pas fixées," and their young faces bore the stamp of that surfeit of luxury and laziness that had long ago robbed their lives of all interest and charm.

In the middle of the terrace a queer company was drawing universal attention to itself. The men had dirty hands and wore shabby coats, glaring ties, and dusty boots. The women were red-haired, vulgar, and noisy. Their table was littered with the most choice and expensive dishes, to which they helped themselves greedily without

order or system, even forbidding the waiters to change their plates. The other visitors threw them astonished glances, the waiters winked knowingly at each other, and the elegant French group sitting near Irene simply gasped in horrified wonder.

"Vous verrez qu'ils se moucheront dans leur serviette, et embrasseront les femmes au dessert," said a middle-aged Frenchman, scrutinizing the offenders severely.

"Ma foi, j'ai envie de téléphoner au commissaire de police," answered another; "they have probably murdered and robbed somebody on the highway, and have come here to enjoy themselves on the spoils!"

"Not a bit," sighed a third enviously. "They have simply had luck at the tables; it is always that kind that wins!"

The restaurant in the meantime was becoming very crowded. Two badly dressed, middle-aged Englishwomen, with flabby cheeks and triple chins, but wearing a King's ransom in diamonds and furs, were looking round for a table. These noble ladies had seen and experienced so much in their lives

that they were no longer capable of taking an interest in anything except two enormous dogs, which, in spite of prohibitions, they had brought with them. The dogs tore at their leashes, wriggled out of their collars, and poked their noses into people's plates. The visitors protested, but in vain. All the waiters seemed to know the dogs, petted them, and called them by their names, while the head-waiter led the English ladies to a reserved table, and, bowing obsequiously, waited for their order. The musicians, in their red and gold coats, played with redoubled gusto. Their violins sang and wept and danced. Some of the public applauded; others called up one or another of the players, and gave him money. Alas! these artists who could extract such sublime tones from their instruments were only too glad to accept even trifling tips! Close to Gzhatski sat, deep in meditation, with his elbows on the table, a handsome young German. He had come very early, and had ordered a choice supper for two. The champagne had long been standing ready on ice; red roses were scat-

tered over the snowy tablecloth. Time passed, and still *she* came not! The poor young German was excited, jumped up every minute and looked towards the door, from time to time rushed out to the porch, and repeatedly questioned the long-suffering head-waiter.

"Mais, monsieur le Baron, j'ai déjà eu l'honneur de vous dire," replied the latter wearily. "'Viendrai si je puis,' tel est le message, pris au téléphone."

Neighbouring visitors were observing the poor young man with some amusement, and the waiters were smiling. The champagne had been twice taken away and brought back again, the crowd was thinning, the musicians were playing their final number, when at last a cab drove up to the door. The enamoured swain rushed forward ecstatically, to meet a a fragile, dainty, blue-eyed Gretchen, who entered shyly, dressed all in white, and wreathed in blushes and smiles. This was not the German but the French type of Gretchen, a type that rarely goes as far as the complete *faux pas*, but delights in the temptations and risks of love-making and philander-

ing. Feeling that resistance is their chief charm, these Dresden china temptresses never hurry to surrender.

"Is that all he was waiting for, poor boy?" said Gzhatski, with a pitying smile. "Hardly worth while. She has not a farthingsworth of temperament."

The "poor boy," however, was in the seventh heaven. He filled the lady's glass, helped her to everything, ate nothing himself, gazed at his Gretchen, and sighed deeply. He would have been ridiculous had not the divine spark of sincere passion illumined his innocent, frank young face. With his elbows on the table, he appeared to be ardently persuading the young lady of something, and suddenly, in a low voice, began to recite.

"He is not a German for nothing!" laughed Gzhatski. "Let us escape; or else we shall have to listen to the whole of Goethe."

But Sergei Grigorievitch was mistaken. The young man was reciting, in excellent French, the famous "Déclaration" of Richepin:

"L'amour que je sens, l'amour qui me cuit,
Ce n'est pas l'amour chaste et platonique,
Sorbet à la neige, avec un biscuit,
C'est l'amour de chair, c'est un plat tonique.

"C'est l'amour brûlant comme me feu grégeois
C'est l'amour féroce et l'amour solide,
Surtout ce n'est pas l'amour des bourgeois,
Amour de bourgeois, amour d'invalide.

"Ce n'est pas non plus l'amour de roman,
Faux, prétentieux avec une glose
De si, de pourquoi, de mais, de comment,
C'est l'amour tout simple, et pas autre chose.

"C'est l'amour puissant, c'est l'amour vermeil.
Je serai le flot, tu seras la dune,
Tu seras la terre, et moi le soleil,
Et cela vaut mieux que leur clair de lune."

Gretchen pretended to be frightened, but Irene glanced mutely at Gzhatski, and they both thought "It is true!" The wine, the supper, the music, had affected them; they spoke little, looked at each other mysteriously, and, all unconsciously, sighed as deeply as the young German.

They left the restaurant, overcome with tenderness, pressing close to each other, and softly humming the passionate, recently-heard

melodies that still echoed in their ears. The night was dark and warm and sultry. They had not far to go. Their hotel gleamed white, silent, and ghostly, between the trees. The door leading into the garden was ajar, and a streak of light fell across the path. As they approached they saw that not everyone had yet retired for the night. The dark beauty of the afternoon's incident was standing motionless on the veranda, leaning her elbow on the balustrade, as though waiting for someone. She had taken off her enormous hat, and had thrown a black lace shawl over her hair. Between her teeth she held a red rose. Gzhatski passed without looking at her, and her glance followed him with a sarcastic smile.

"She looks like Carmen," said Irene. "Carmen in the first act, when she is tempting Don José."

Sergei Grigorievitch quite unexpectedly flared up. "Carmen!" he exclaimed in a white rage. "Carmen! Can you think of any more poetical comparisons? She is not Carmen, but simply a ——!"

"Sergei Grigorievitch!" gasped Irene.

"Well? You think that is not a drawing-room expression? Very well—I take it back, and I beg your pardon—but it expresses my idea excellently. However, don't let us continue the conversation; it is time to go to bed. Here we are at your door. I wish you a good night!"

XXI

Gzhatski's good wish, however, was not destined to be fulfilled. Was it the music or the black coffee that was to blame? It is difficult to say. But however it may be, Irene found it impossible to go to sleep. She tried drinking sugared water, applied cold compresses to her head, turned from side to side, got up and paced the room, opened the window—all in vain, for sleep obstinately refused to answer her call. At last, towards four o'clock in the morning, she threw on her dressing-gown, sat down on the sofa with a book, and hoped to fall asleep with the dawn, as frequently happened to her after a wakeful night.

Even the book, however, failed to interest her—her excited brain refusing to follow the tangled thread of the sugary English novel.

Leaving the heroine to drink a twentieth cup of tea on the lawn in company with the hero, who had just won a set of tennis, Irene threw down the book and lost herself in her own thoughts. Russia, her departure from Petrograd, her first impressions of Rome, Père Etienne, her meeting with Gzhatski—all this and many other confused recollections passed through her mind.

"How unexpectedly everything has arranged itself," she thought, with a quiet smile. "How foolish we all are when we make plans, and arrange and fuss and worry, and seriously imagine we can direct our own destinies! God does everything in His own way, and always for the best, since our needs and our characters are far better known to Him than to ourselves. There was I, for instance, imagining that I had nothing more to live for, and, suddenly, God sent me so incomparable a lover, so immense a happiness. In my fairest dreams, I had never seen so ideal a husband—so handsome, so clever, so good, so noble. What a contrast, indeed, between him and the worthless Petrograd

officials, with their vulgar ambitions, their greed for money, and their mean and petty spites and jealousies! My noble Sergei! You are like the sun, in comparison to those worms!

"And he has such high ideals!" continued Irene dreamily to herself. "How severely he judged that unhappy woman! A little too severely perhaps, but that only proves how seriously he looks upon love. Oh! my dear one, my dear one!

"All the priests were wrong when they found my faith pagan. I knew I was right! God wanted to try me with long and dark years of despair and suffering, but finding that I was not embittered, and that I had remained, in spite of everything, honest and good, He has sent me this wonderful happiness as a reward. My faith was the right one, my God has triumphed!"

Irene rejoiced and exulted, and life had never seemed so glorious to her before. Suddenly she felt that this was the happiest moment of her existence, and that nothing still happier could or would ever be. She rose, opened the door leading to the balcony,

and stepped out. It was still dark, but one could already distinguish the trees, and there were grey streaks in the sky.

"Soon the sun will rise," thought Irene. "How lovely the view must be from the Casino Terrace!"

The idea of seeing the sun rise attracted her. "I have lived all this time, and have never once seen it," she said to herself. "How surprised Sergei will be when I tell him my impressions!"

Irene dressed hurriedly, and, having thrown a cloak over her dress and a scarf over her hair, stepped softly out into the corridor. All was quiet, and a grey streak of light was filtering through the glass door leading into the garden. Like a ghost, Irene slipped along the passage, when, suddenly, the slight movement of a door on the right attracted her attention. The door gradually opened, softly, slowly, carefully. Something guilty and horrible seemed suggested by this carefulness. Irene stopped still in the shadow of a large cupboard, her eyes riveted on the moving door.

At last it stood half-way open, and yester-

day's Carmen-like beauty appeared on the threshold. She wore a lace dressing-gown, and her long, wavy hair hung in heavy coils down her back. The beauty glanced to right and to left along the passage, then turned round with a whispered word, and out of the room issued—Gzhatski! He, too, whispered something, and they both laughed softly. Stepping carefully on tip-toe over the carpet, Sergei Grigorievitch stole towards the staircase, and disappeared round its bend. The beauty closed her door. . . .

Poor Irene's knees shook, and all but gave way under her. Leaning against the wall, with hardly strength enough to drag one foot before the other, she staggered back to her room, and fell, almost lifeless, on the sofa.

The sun had long since risen and was forcing its way in through the shutters. The birds had long been singing, noise and movement were in the air, everywhere people were laughing and talking, but Irene still lay prone and motionless. Thoughts were rushing wildly through her head, but she could not disentangle them. Slowly, gradually, she

began to realize the full force of the terrific blow that had fallen on her.

"So that is what you are like," she murmured childishly. "And I had believed in you so completely, and had placed you so high . . ."

For a moment the voice of reason tried to pacify her. "But this is nothing more than a man's adventure, a prank, a caprice after a gay supper," it whispered seriously. But Irene paid no attention. "If it were only the supper," she argued, "why did not Sergei come to *her*, to his bride? What cared she for marriage ceremonies? Did she not, before God, belong to Gzhatski soul and body? But no, he had not come to her. He considered her old and ugly and repulsive!"

This thought filled Irene with such an agony of despair that she slipped from the sofa to the carpet, rolled about and knocked her head against the floor, striving by this means to deaden her unbearable pain. "You are old, you are ridiculous, you are hideous, in spite of your fashionable dresses!" she exclaimed wildly to herself, and, rising from the carpet, she tottered towards the looking-

glass, and gazed disgustedly at her own tear-stained, tortured, suddenly aged and disfigured reflection.

"So this is the part that has been allotted to you in Sergei's life!" she hissed. "You are the ideal, the image of his mother, the statue of purity that stands on a pedestal surrounded by respect and homage! I am sick to death of this eternal respect! I want *love*—one month, one day, one hour of *love!* But no—love belongs only to such as Carmen; never will it fall to my lot! Oh! if this is so, if this is so, I do not want to live!"

A bitter resentment against God took possession of Irene's soul. "What is the object of this mockery?" she groaned. "Thou knowest that if I had entered a convent I should have been an exemplary nun. Of what use was it to distract me from my purpose, and send me a hope of happiness, only to shatter it cruelly with a derisive laugh? As if I had not suffered enough without this! All my life has been nothing but suffering, nothing but pain. But to Thee, this seemed insufficient—there was still this last refinement of torture to apply! But who art Thou

in the end, thou mighty torturer of men's soul's? Thou art no God, no just and generous Being, such as He whom my imagination had created. No—Thou art a vampire, sucking the blood of men's hearts! But I will be even with Thee yet. I will prove myself the stronger of the two. I will kill myself, and so deprive Thee of the joy of torturing me."

"Pull yourself together," whispered reason. "Look at life more soberly. Your Sergei is not perhaps as depraved as it would seem. There was nothing to prevent his passing all his life in the company of beautiful Carmens, and yet you know how he has been struggling all the winter to win *you*. That was because he felt that only you could give him happiness. Cannot you, in return, struggle a little for *him?* Will you not try with the strength of your love to keep alight in him the divine spark that burns in every human soul? You are pure and virtuous, and therefore stronger than all the Carmens in the world. Victory belongs to you, and not to them!"

"No, no, no!" answered Irene. "I cannot, and will not—for I do not love

him any more. He is repulsive to me. I loved a strong, honest, ideal man. What do I want with this pitiful wretch, who has not enough strength of mind to follow the dictates of his own conscience? Could I ever forget the look of that contemptible, cowardly figure, stealing guiltily along the passage after an iniquitious interview with his loathsome associate! His bright image in my heart is shattered for ever, never again can I look at him in the old way."

The savage beast that Gzhatski had once mentioned to Irene had awakened in her, and growled and roared, its appetite roused and unsatisfied! . . .

"I will drown myself—throw myself from the rocks above the Monaco gardens!" she thought. But the idea of going out into the sunshine and facing the triumphant glory of Southern nature, caused her to frown nervously.

"They are all happy out there," she muttered angrily. "Very well, they can be as happy as they like. It is all the same to me. I must do away with myself here, in this dark room."

Her glance swept the walls in search of a nail, and returned to the table, arrested by a glass of pinkish water.

On arriving at Monte Carlo Irene had developed, on account of the strong sea air, a slight rash on her face. Having just at that time been very particular about her appearance, she had applied to a doctor, who had given her a lotion composed of a solution of sublimate, with the warning that it was a strong poison, for external application only. Irene had prepared the solution each evening, in readiness for use the following morning, and a glassful of it was now standing temptingly on her table. She approached. In her imagination she saw frightful tortures and frantic pains.

"Nonsense, nonsense," she whispered to herself encouragingly. "Are you such a coward? What are a few hours of physical pain compared to the unbearable mental sufferings which, with your tiresome good health, might last another forty years! And however cruel your sufferings have been till now, at least you had some faith in God, in His miracles and His power. What would

life be like now, when even this last straw of comfort has been taken from you?"

Irene shuddered. Struggling with the animal instinct of "Life at all costs," she alternately stretched out her hand towards the glass, and withdrew it again. Suddenly a strange thought came into her mind.

"Could it be that Nature, foreseeing the possibility of her having children by Gzhatski, and finding it necessary to protect these future children from inheriting her moral disease, from suffering, from leading useless, miserable lives and spreading darkness and despair along their path, had purposely sent her out to see the sun rise that morning, and was now hurrying her to drink the glass of poison?"

A strong feeling of resentment accompanied this thought.

"But why such tender solicitude for these unborn creatures?" thought the unfortunate girl, "and such cold, cruel indifference to me and my sufferings?"

And she felt inclined to upset the glass, throw away the tempting poison, and live on, just to spite Nature. . . .

There was a knock at the door.

"Irene Pavlovna, are you still asleep?" Gzhatski's gay voice resounded in the passage. "Do get up and come out! It is a glorious morning, just like the one Fett* sings about. Do you remember?

"'I have brought to thee a greeting
From this rosy summer morn;
Come! the golden hours are fleeting. . . .'"

The blood rushed to Irene's head.

"He is gay and happy!" she thought. "In whose arms has he gleaned this joy?"

And such an insufferable sense of insult and of irony conveyed itself to her mind through Gzhatski's light-hearted greeting, that with a sudden impulse she seized the glass and swallowed the poison in one draught.

The door opened, and Gzhatski entered.

"Oh! you are quite ready!" he exclaimed. "Why didn't you answer? There I stood, like a Spanish hidalgo, declaiming at your door! What is the matter? Why do you look so tragic?"

Irene looked at him in silence, and crossed her arms on her chest.

* A famous Russian poet.

"I saw you come out from that room at dawn," she said, in a low whisper and with trembling lips.

"You saw? . . ." And Gzhatski blushed deeply. "Well, then. Of course you now think I am a scoundrel. I am not going to try and justify myself. I ask you only one thing—do not, for Heaven's sake, lower yourself in my eyes by being jealous of that disgusting creature. If only you could understand what an abyss separates you from her! To me she is not a woman. She is—a glass of whisky that I must drink sometimes, a cigarette that one has the need of smoking at certain moments. . . . Forgive me—I have no right to tell you these things. But it is incredible that you girls can pass through life without understanding them. What am I to say, how am I to prove to you that that miserable worm simply does not exist for me? If it can please you, let us go immediately to the North Cape or to Central Africa. She will not follow us there! What is the matter? Oh! what is it? What is it?"

Irene had fallen to the ground with a cry, and was writhing on the carpet. Gzhatski

fell on his knees beside her and caught her up in his arms.

"Irene! Irene! My darling! My dearest one! Tell me. What is it? Don't frighten me so!"

"I am lost!" whispered Irene in terror, clinging spasmodically to Gzhatski, and only just then realizing to the full what she had done to herself. "I am dying; I have poisoned myself with sublimate!"

"Poisoned yourself! How? Purposely? Because of that accursed Frenchwoman?"

"Yes!" whispered Irene shamefacedly.

Gzhatski gazed at her for a moment in horror.

"Oh! madness! madness!" he cried helplessly.

Then, regaining his presence of mind, he tore himself from her embrace, and rushed to the door.

"A doctor! A doctor!" His voice rang wildly through the corridor.

"Too late—too late!" muttered Irene. And the agony set in.

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